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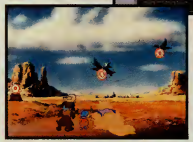

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Neil Randall
James C. Slate
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MPA

EDITOR'S NOTES

Two years ago, I bought a 386SX for home use. With a meg of RAM and a 40-meg hard drive, I figured it would be more than good enough to keep up with most of the games I'd be playing for the next couple of years.

But in those two years, the PC entertainment software industry has significantly reoriented its approaches to game design (thanks in large part to hardware advances and cascading prices). Judging from several leading titles, designers consider a 386SX the entry-level PC, and then only if it has 2 megs of RAM. Those are the minimum hardware requirements for *Aces of the Pacific*, but if you trying running it on that setup you'll realize that when publishers say minimum, they mean *minimum*. With full-blown 386s reaching record-low prices, it's clear that designers are assuming that more and more consumers have relatively powerful PCs.

Even if you do have plenty of RAM and a very fast processor, you're still faced with increasing demands on storage. *The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes*, Electronic Arts' debut graphic adventure, requires 640K of RAM — but if you opt for the fastest game play, you'll need 29 megs of hard disk space. If you've got a 40-meg hard drive like I do, that forces you to make some tough choices.

Now comes CD-ROM technology, providing programmers and designers with incredible amounts of storage space and providing them with more artistic leeway than they've ever had before. *The 7th Guest*, the *two*-CD title slated for Halloween release from Virgin, is the first hint of the full potential offered by CD-based games. T. Liam MacDonald's behind-the-scenes look at the creation of this groundbreaking product gives a glimpse at how cutting-edge designers feel about pushing the extreme in utilizing the latest in hardware advances.

From the letters we receive, it's obvious that many gamers out there are faced with difficult decisions about when and how much to upgrade, and in our next few issues we'll be tackling the issue head-on with in-depth reports on memory expansion and management, hardware upgrades, and the new generation of games using SVGA. Until then, enjoy the issue — and keep those letters coming in!

Stephen Poole
Associate Editor

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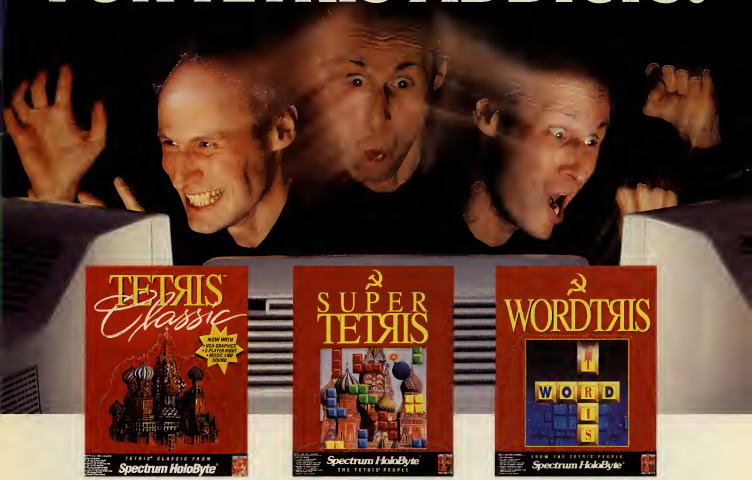

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MERCHANT COLONY

This Merit release proudly displays its British origins, zestfully re-creating the golden age of colonialism without batting an eye in the direction of post-imperialist sensibilities. Impressions Software, the game's developer (see "PC News for more on Impressions), has designed a trading-and-resource-management game that allows the player to fashion his or her own version of the East India Company or any of the other powerful trading cartels of the 18th century.

Although considerably simplified in the interests of playability, *Merchant Colony* faithfully mirrors the geo-political realities of an age when trade was everything, and the nation which excelled in it could comfortably rule a great chunk of the world.

Beginning in Liverpool with a fixed amount of resources, the player buys ships, stocks them with various types of colonists or cargo, and sails forth to plant new colonies or trade with existing ones. As in real life, prices fluctuate greatly, and fortunes are won or lost according to the vagaries of nature or the activities of pirates.

Different types of colonists perform different functions, and require varying amounts of overhead to maintain. Soldiers are useful for "pacifying" the natives or guarding against the incursions of a rival power, explorers are essential for mapping the land and pinpointing natural resources, while teachers, businessmen, and other bureaucrats are necessary to create a viable infrastructure.

Players familiar with Koei's *Uncharted Waters* will no doubt note similarities between it and *Merchant Colony*, but they also differ in several crucial aspects. The world is already mapped when you start *Merchant Colony*, so the exploration element of the game is limited to mapping the land radiating out from your port. And *Merchant Colony* lacks the detailed naval battles which occur in the later stages of *Uncharted Waters*. But those engagements are rather tedious, and their absence is more than compensated for by the engrossing process of nurturing your colonies from their crude beginnings to their peak of economic productivity decades later.

The mouse-driven interface is graceful, and the game is presented in boldly colorful graphics. Some aspects of the game, like the automated pirate encounters, appear to be little more than afterthoughts, but for the most part *Merchant Colony* is a fairly solid and engrossing simulation.

— *William R. Trotter*

MAGNETIC SCROLLS

A couple years ago, Virgin Games gave us *Wonderland*, which brought Lewis Carroll's famous fantasy into the realm of the text adventure. But this was a text adventure with a difference: using a sophisticated windowing system, *Wonderland* let you see not only text, but also colorful graphics, a map of where you were and where you'd been, a picture of the items in your inventory, and icons for all the items in the room you were in. In many ways, it was a text adventurer's dream come true, and a long, long way from the text-only look of the early-80's adventures like *Zork*, *Deadline*, and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

Magnetic Scrolls combines three old text adventures into one package, upgrading them all to the *Wonderland* system of graphics and windows. *Guild of Thieves* is a hack'n'slash fantasy puzzle; *Corruption* turns you loose against the evils of making it big in the corporate world and its surrounding city sleaze; and *Fish*, the most like *Wonderland* of the three, does away with such things as simple physical logic in a bizarre espionage thriller that's a little like James Bond meets Flipper.

As with all text adventures, you basically type your way through each game. At all stages, you're presented with a command line, and you say things like "Turn upside down" or "Take everything except the grenade, then open the chest." After each command (assuming you've typed a reasonable command that the text-parser understands) you're shown a new graphic, an updated map, an enhanced inventory, and so on. The system is the most highly sophisticated available in the text adventure genre — if you can call this combination of text and graphic information a "text adventure."

But before you buy this game, try to find out if it will work on your system. You need at least 500K free RAM, and *much* more to ensure that the program works properly at all times. The installation program is very poor, and the game doesn't like TSRs or even some memory managers. *Magnetic Scrolls* is strong, but problems with system compatibility can quickly destroy enthusiasm.

— *Neil Randall*

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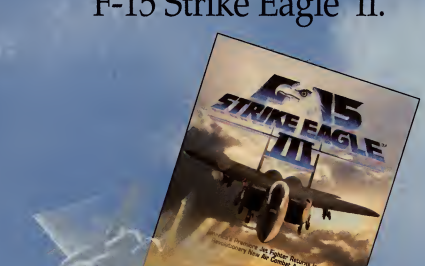

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BAB

SPECIAL OPERATIONS 2 FOR WING COMMANDER

This latest add-on for **Origin**'s sci-fi classic starts with a typical Chris Roberts' set-piece drama: the court martial of the traitor "Jazz" Colson, whose cowardly life you spared at the end of *Wing Commander*. Colson is, most deservedly, sentenced to die, and you're ordered to escort the ship taking him back to Earth for execution.

But Colson never gets to Earth: his ship is seized by Kilrathi sympathizers who hyperjump out of sight before you can blink. Naturally, ol' Jazz wants to leave a message for his former wingman, so he

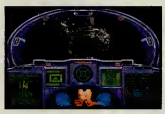
sends a transmission vowing to kill you before the game ends.

To make matters worse, there seems to be more than one traitor aboard the *Concordia*, not to mention a *lot* of Kilrathi attention focused on your carrier. The reason? The Confederation is sending a prototype of its newest superfighter, the *Morningstar*, for its shakedown trials, and the Kilrathi will stop at nothing to get their hands on it: this baby comes armed with nuclear missiles that can wipe out an entire squadron! (Don't worry; you *will* get to fly one....)

If you're a *Wing Commander* addict, you probably sense from this outline that the plot thickens with every mission and the characters' relationships once again achieve a remarkable sort of quasi-reality. By now, these people are as comfortably known to us as the crew of the *Enterprise*, and encountering them again is like meeting old friends. Origin hasn't tampered with the basic formula, but neither has the series sunk to the level of clichés.

The missions in this add-on are sometimes *very* tough, but always do-able if you keep trying. There are some interesting new wrinkles, too: the *Morningstar* is a real galaxy-buster when it unleashes its full firepower, and you now have the option of customizing the insults you hurl at your Kilrathi opponents. Have fun.

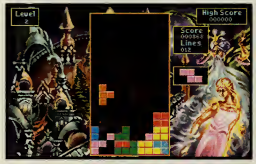
It must be said that there are a few signs here and there of undue haste to get *Special Operations 2* to market. The dialogue lines from many conversation screens flicker badly, and we were unable to engage the advanced targeting system on a Sabre, which is supposed to be equipped with that tech-



nology. These are both minor blemishes, however, in a product that lives up to the high standards set by its predecessors.

— William R. Trotter

TETRIS CLASSIC



Two groups of PC game players should make it a point to get *Tetris Classic*: those who missed the *Tetris* phenomenon four years ago, and those who found this puzzle game to be addictive — in other words, just about everyone.

When **Spectrum HoloByte** brought Alexey Pajitnov's invention from Moscow to North America in 1988, *Tetris* became an instant hit. What makes the new *Tetris Classic* so appealing is not just its fresh suit of clothes — 256-color VGA graphics, new artwork, and sound and music support for 11 sound cards — but its multitude of game variations.

What makes *Tetris Classic* a better game than its predecessor is its five different play modes: single player, cooperative, competitive, dual pit, and head-to-head (for modem play). The single-player mode, functionally identical to the play of the original *Tetris*, lets you select a timer (2-, 5-, 10-, or 15-minutes) if you want to play under pressure or just force yourself to quit because of time constraints. Other options let you choose from ten difficulty levels, select from four heights, allow you to view the next piece before it appears, and control the speed of the falling pieces. There are other fascinating variables — each of which affects your game strategy — that apply to the two-player games.

These two-player contests are especially engaging. In dual-pit mode, for example, two grids are displayed on the screen side-by-side, with each player getting the same pieces in the same order. (During one session, for lack of a human opponent, I pitted my right hand against my left. Try it for a new adventure in motor-skill coordination.)

The art backgrounds, as well as the introductory musical score, are thematically based on Alexander Pushkin's fairy-tale poem, *Ruslan and Ludmila*. As you move through the game, the screens change, progressively telling the story of Pushkin's epic poem.

Combined with the intriguing play variations, the new look and lush sound of *Tetris* make it a much richer game than the original. A nod goes to **Spectrum HoloByte** for a terrific package that gives a new lease to an old friend.

—Lance Elko

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Screens shown are from the Amiga version of the game. Amiga is a registered trademark of Commodore Electronics Ltd.

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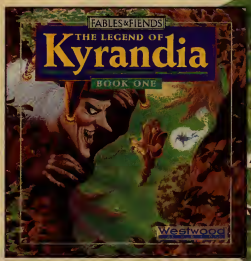

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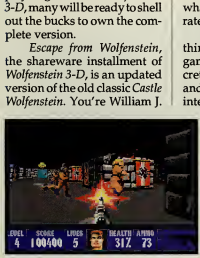
WOLFENSTEIN 3-D — ESCAPE FROM WOLFENSTEIN

It's often hard for small game publishers to get the kind of distribution they need to hit the big time, but **Apogee** seems to have found the perfect solution. By offering an installment of each of their games as shareware, they give their products some much-needed name recognition. And when players get a taste of *Wolfenstein 3-D*, many will be ready to shell out the bucks to own the complete version.

Escape from Wolfenstein, the shareware installment of *Wolfenstein 3-D*, is an updated version of the old classic *Castle Wolfenstein*. You're William J.



"B.J." Blazkowicz, an American spy being held prisoner by the Germans in Castle Wolfenstein. After subduing a guard, you have only a pistol and your wits to help you escape your captivity. You of course pick up firepower along the way, in addition to first-aid kits and food that repair any damage you've taken.

When we say you *are* B.J. Blazkowicz, we mean it. The first-person perspective is fantastic — you see your clenched hands holding a knife, pistol, burp gun, or machine gun as you sneak up on guards or mow down a line of SS officers. And this isn't the sanitized mayhem of past video games. Each hit is accompanied with a spurt of blood and a digitized cry of anguish (the SS guards scream *"Mein Leben!"* when shot), and instead of disappearing, the bodies lie in a crimson pool. Id Software, developers of the game, have rated the game PC-13 (PC standing for "profound carnage") on the basis that the violence here is no worse than what you'd find in a movie rated PG-13.

Id has done almost everything right for this style of game. There are plenty of secret rooms holding treasure and equipment; the guards are intelligent, avoiding the patterned movement of enemies found in almost every video game; and all game functions, from loading games to system configuration, are handled neatly and quickly.

The realistic motion from the 3-D perspective is fantastic on a 386/25, but players with slower machines can shrink the viewing window if things get choppy. CompuServe has removed this first installment due to objections by German officials (the numerous Nazi icons and images in the game are verboten in Germany), so players interested in this action-packed shooter need to call 1-800-GAME123 for more info.

— Stephen Poole

QUEST FOR GLORY I — VGA VERSION

Even if you've played this game, you'll probably want to take another look at the updated version of *Quest for Glory I: So You Want to Be a Hero*, the first chapter in what is arguably **Sierra's** best series of graphic adventures. Its VGA graphics make it look better than ever, with larger characters, more intricate rooms, and closeups that use claymation. Of course, it also employs Sierra's new icon-driven interface, a pro or con depending on your impression of the old text interface.

Unlike many adventures that you play once and stick on a shelf, *Quest for Glory* is designed for repeat play. The plot of the story doesn't change from game to game, but certain aspects vary depending on the character you choose to play as — fighter, magician, or thief. In other words, you can play *Quest for Glory* three times and always find new challenges. You can also save your characters to use in *Quest for Glory II: Trial by Fire* and the upcoming *QGIII: Wages of War*.

The game is set in Spielburg, a land beset with misfortune. Not only is Spielburg besieged by a band of ruthless brigands, but the baron (Stefan von Spielburg, naturally) has also lost his son, daughter, and court jester to the enchantment of the evil Baba Yaga. These people sorely need a hero. Luckily, you wander down Main Street at just the right time.

So You Want to Be a Hero is a great game, filled with mythic figures, intricate puzzles, and fast action. And now that it looks better than ever, you're sure to be hooked.

— Leslie Mizell

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NICK'S PICKS — LEISURE SUIT LARRY'S CASINO

One of the fun things about many of **Sierra**'s adventure games is the inclusion of arcade or board game interludes — flying a hovercraft and playing the slots in *Space Quest I*, trying your hand at archery or learning Nine Men's Morris in *Conquests of the Longbow*, or mud-wrestling and anteing up for a few hands of video poker in *Leisure Suit Larry V*.

Sierra has apparently realized this, for they've just come out with *Nick's Picks*, a new line of low-priced ($9.95) packages that combine the various arcade and board or card game segments from best-selling series like Space Quest, Leisure Suit Larry, Laura Bow, and King's Quest.

Leisure Suit Larry's Casino, the debut in the series, includes three time-honored casino favorites: slots, video poker, and blackjack. You enter the casino (alone — there is no two-player option) with $100, but if you hit a losing streak you can always ask the "loan shark" for another C-note to continue playing.

Rules for each game aren't included — not a drawback when it comes to slots and video poker, which are very simple to play. But a short primer on some of blackjack's finer points would be helpful; while everyone knows the object is to get as close to 21 as possible, an explanation of splitting, doubling down, and buying insurance would help novice players get into the swing of things.

The interface and cartoonish graphics for each game are lifted straight from the VGA versions of *Space Quest I* and *Leisure Suit Larry I*, as well as *Leisure Suit Larry V*. The lounge-lizard soundtrack is amusing but unobtrusive, probably contributing more than the interface to a feeling of being in a casino.

There are only four game screens in *Larry's Casino* — but you can't really expect a smorgasbord of visual variety at this price. Though the redraw time on a 386SX is just a bit slow, the program will make use of any extended memory to speed things up.

You won't learn anything *about* these three games by picking up *Larry's Casino*, but they do offer a quick dose of gambling action that's easy to play and fun to look at.

—*Stephen Poole*

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HI-TECH HORROR: THE MAKING OF

T. LIAM MACDONALD

Everything you've ever thought about computer games is about to change. Put aside your preconceptions, forget about those little figures or digitized creations that plod through so many adventure games, and cast away your worries about hard disk space. This Halloween, Trilobyte, spearheaded by the creative trio of artist Rob Landeros, programmer Graeme Devine, and author Matthew Costello, will release *The 7th Guest* through software publisher Virgin Games — a two-CD, one-gigabyte monster into which the three have packed two years' work, a half-million dollars, and several lifetimes of experience.

Folks, you ain't seen nothin' like this.

The hype machine has been working overtime for almost a year on this one, but for a change all the attention seems warranted. Landeros and Devine, two former members of Virgin Software's research and development team, left Virgin and founded Trilobyte two years ago, putting them at the forefront of the move to use the massive storage space and quality afforded by CD-ROM technology to design state-of-the art entertainment software. In those two years, they have pushed the technological envelope even further to create the most powerful computer game to date.

In an interview conducted with Rob and Graeme from their Oregon offices, they discussed leaving Virgin to strike out on their own. Graeme recalls the decision: "Virgin started to go in the direction of cartridge games, and Rob and I thought that our futures weren't tied to these 8-bit or 16-bit cartridges. CD-ROMs were in our future.

"We were going around from conference to conference exploring this new technology," Rob adds, "and we felt that if we were recommending that Virgin get into this area, we should be able to come up with some good reason for them to, some good design that we felt optimized this technology."

It was while coming back from one of those conferences that they hit upon a direction that would eventually lead to *The 7th Guest*. It began, Graeme says, with them discussing "an interactive version of "Twin Peaks," just based around the one episode that had been shown. Then we moved on to an idea for doing a David Lynch-like version of Clue, involving an interactive house with a murder taking place in it. The next step was horror."

They came up with the central idea of a strange house built by a toymaker, and then went looking for a writer. Rob came across the name of horror novelist and journalist Matthew Costello on the GEnie network, and contacted him. Costello, author of several highly acclaimed horror novels (*Darkborn*, *Beneath Still Waters*, etc.), was also a well-known game reviewer, as well as the designer of several board and role-playing games. Graeme says, "We presented the basic story to Matt,

and he made it into a larger story, built the characters and the script. He created it out of what was really just a sketch. We were anxious that the interface be very, very closed. One that would work as a computer environment. That's what he gave us. One of our luckiest breaks was coming across Matthew Costello. We encouraged Matt to script with no concern for how it would be executed, and that's what he did."

For his part, Costello was thrilled to be involved with the project. "One of my dreams was to do a horror computer game because I didn't think it had been done, and up until this date it still hasn't been done. I mean a game that was *actually scary*. When I got involved, I had no idea of the scope of the project. At that time they didn't have any mechanics in place. They basically opened the door and said 'What do you want to do?' I was looking for specific directions, whereas they wanted me to bring the full brunt of my creativity to this. That caught me off guard because I didn't expect to have that much latitude."

Matt's first step was to write a story detailing the house, its past, present, and future (time is a variable in *The 7th Guest*), and what was to happen. When he was done, he had an 81-page novella, which he then turned into a script. Upon entering the house in the game, you see this story unfold in a series of animation sequences.

Costello's plot centers around Henry Stauf, a small-time crook and hoodlum who finally hits rock bottom. Shortly after one of his crimes, he has a vision of a carved doll with an extraordinary face, and becomes so obsessed that he carves a duplicate of the image. Down on his luck, he rolls into a local bar, doll in hand. Everyone is immediately struck by the doll. The bartender asks to buy it for his daughter, which leads Stauf to making similar items for other people.

Stauf has more visions, seeing intricate puzzles and other strange things. He develops a reputation as a wonderfully gifted toymaker, and his growing sales pave the way for an incredible success story. Stauf is now a mover and shaker, with a chain of toy stores and his name on the lips of children everywhere. It's then that

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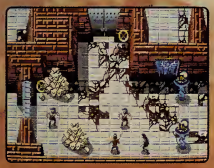

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he starts seeing visions of an extremely bizarre house, almost like one of his puzzle creations. As with the image of the doll, he's compelled to build the house — as soon as it's completed, strange things start happening. Children throughout the town start getting sick. A little girl dies with a Henry Stauf doll clutched in her hand.

Shortly thereafter Stauf closes all his toy stores and seals himself up in his mansion, and it's here — during Depression-era America, and after the deaths of many of the town's children — that the game proper begins. Six guests are invited to the mansion, and they accept with the hope that Henry Stauf will fulfill their dreams. The object of the party is to enter this puzzle house and solve the puzzles that Stauf lays before them. What they don't know is that there is another guest, one that's the key to a puzzle that is beyond their imaginations. When they solve that puzzle, they discover the true nature of Henry Stauf, his visions, and his house.

"You travel through the game as yourself," Costello points out. "We call it 'The Ego.' You don't know why you're in this house. You don't know how you got in. You don't know how to get out.

And you're not so sure what you're supposed to do while you're there. You see the other guests, but they can't see or interact with you until very late in the game. You are trying to learn the story of what happened to these guests; to piece together Stauf's plan and to discover what your role is in it."

He describes *7th Guest* as "an interconnected script based on triggers: what you click on, what you do, which puzzle you solve, whether you come back to a room you've already visited. There's an intricate web of scenes in this 100-page script. There's definitely more than one ending. Of course, there's a preferred ending! Technically, in the course of exploring the house, I don't believe there's a danger of you dying. There's a danger of other things happening to you that may stretch your sanity a bit, but dying is not one of them. As you come to the climax, there is more than one possibility. There are many layers, many things happening."

Matt has been like a mine of ideas," Devine is quick to acknowledge. "If we had worked with someone with preconceptions of what we can and can't do, they'd be working within those preconceptions, instead of saying, 'Well, why *can't* you have this.' Then we can look at new ways of doing it. That's probably the biggest contribution Matthew could have offered us."

For Costello's part, he describes it as "the best creative experience of my lifetime. It would probably be enough for a lifetime. To be given that much freedom and to work that closely with people who are going to do something remarkable is an incredible gift to me. I think it's going to usher in the age of the writer in the computer game. At the time I was doing it, I had no idea that the project -- due to the efforts of Trilobyte -- was going to be ground-breaking. I had no pressure. I just got into it and did it. They didn't put any limits on what I wrote."

Though the atmosphere is one of classic Gothic horror, the game also shades into the realms of fantasy and science-fiction. You travel throughout the 32 locations in the Stauf house, seeing everything as it should appear, and once you're in the house you're in for good. Images from the past may appear randomly, while others will be released when you solve Mr. Stauf's various puzzles, which fill nearly every corner of the house. There are no icons, no inventory, button bars or dialogue boxes.

"Each puzzle works within the environment," Graeme says, "without having an iconized interface come up, without requiring you to use that piece of wire you passed by six screens back and might not have seen."

Rob adds, "We tried to make it as 'non-computer' as possible.

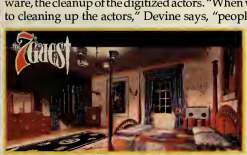
We envisioned it as playing on television somewhere down the road, almost like a touch screen, except with a mouse. It could be sent right into your living room."

The first CD contains the introduction drama and the house, and the second contains the house, the dramatic climax, and the ending. Only one disk switch will be necessary.

Even with CD-ROM sales building, one has to wonder why the Trilobyte team chose such a hardware-intensive game for their first project. Devine's logic is simple: "We believe that *Guest* will last more than the six months that a normal title lasts. The hardware is definitely moving towards a time when it will be able to support products like *The 7th Guest* more and more. Maybe three years down the road *7th Guest* will still be around on a new mass-memory architecture and still be working well. We tried to position ourselves at the cutting edge, where the software will last a long time."

Landeros adds, "We try to develop a year ahead of what we project will be around by the time we finish the product."

Everything Trilobyte did on this project required new techniques: the full-motion video on CD-ROM, the rendering software, the cleanup of the digitized actors. "When we first got around to cleaning up the actors," Devine says, "people said '*How* many frames?' and just laughed and went away. We said we were doing full-motion video, and the people at Microsoft just said 'You're doing *what*?' and laughed and went away. Now they're not laughing."



"Actually," Landeros acknowledges, "our peers have derided us for making false claims early on, saying that we couldn't do it. I guess we'll see, won't we?"

The actors appearing in *The 7th Guest* were shot against blue screen by a professional production company, hired specifically for the task. Trilobyte then digitized the video frame by frame, putting it through one of their special tools to take the blue out. The images are then composited against computer-rendered background. The entire process of removing the blue and cleaning up the video are completely automated.

Though *The 7th Guest* will debut on PC, they intend to release it on multiple platforms as soon as possible. "Part of the theory behind Trilobyte," Graeme says, "was that we didn't want to be limited to PC only. So everything we generate here is 24-bits-per-pixel, and all the sound is CD-quality. We have converters that mash that down to the various platforms. In the case of the PC, down to super VGA. That can then be mashed down to any other format."

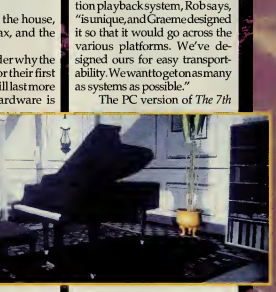
The format of the animation playback system, Rob says, "is unique, and Graeme designed it so that it would go across the various platforms. We've designed ours for easy transportability. We want to get on as many as systems as possible."

The PC version of *The 7th Guest* requires standard MPC technology, and though the game can be played with as little as 1 meg of RAM, more is highly recommended.

This Halloween, gamers will be able to see for themselves what Bill Gates has called "the new standard in Multimedia Entertainment."

Stay tuned.

GP



THE LOST FILES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

LANCE ELKO

No one has ever pegged **Electronic Arts** as a leader in graphic-adventure games, and for one good reason. They've never published one — until now. If *The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes* is any indication of what EA can do with graphic adventures, then bring on the games.

Holmes is, without question, a superb game. It's not only a visual dazzler, but is also one of those rare games that can lure the uninitiated into buying a computer system. The interface is smooth and intuitive, the storyline is compelling, and the sound, music, digitized speech, and beautifully rendered screens are outstanding. Doyle would be proud.

A rainy, foggy London in November, 1888, sets the stage for the game — Jack the Ripper is on the loose.

EA will likely get some flak over the size of the game — it will eat up 29 megabytes of hard-drive space, although you can opt for a 15-meg installation if you're willing to sacrifice a little downtime during play. But after just a few minutes into *Holmes*, I had no qualms with the demand of nearly a quarter of my hard-drive space. I was so enamored, in fact, that I was almost ready to yield my entire hard drive if asked.

With 50-plus game locations, each rendered in 256-color VGA graphics (the only graphics mode supported), charming animation, and speech with authentic British accents, *Holmes* offers a great deal of entertainment value. The designers obviously spent extra effort in creating an accurate historical context, some of which will be especially appreciated if you, like myself, have more than a passing interest in Holmes and Victorian England. For example, an Australian voice-over actor was used for Watson's voice because Watson hailed from Australia. Many dozens of objects placed throughout the game have no relation to solving any mysteries; instead, they offer fascinating insights into everyday Victorian life.

Holmes is not a real-time game — you can proceed at your leisure, saving as you go. Neither is it perfectly linear. An EA staffer noted that we had approached the game in a way that many of their testers had not. Players may follow clues in a different sequence, but eventually everyone will have to travel the same path, visit the same locations, and discover the same clues.

You can mentally note your progress by the number of locations you visit. After you've visited, say, ten sites, you know you have a long way to go. Veteran graphic adventurers are looking at approximately 30 hours of play time, while others may require more than 50.

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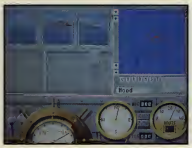
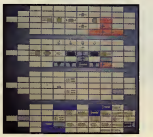
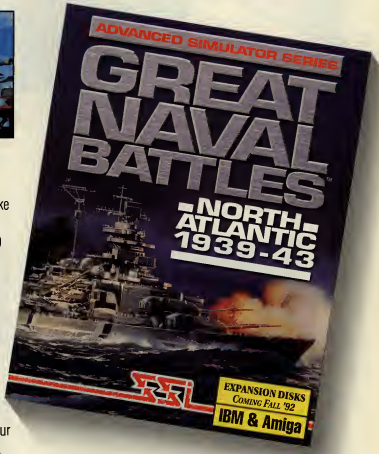
Choose the CAPTAIN'S VIEW and steer majestic ships like the *HMS Hood*; go to full power and watch the action on the screen as 42,000 tons of steel respond to your command. Listen as dramatic sound effects re-create the roar of guns as you fire them. Watch the shells splash in the distance or explode on target. See the flash of enemy guns and feel your ship vibrate as she's hit. Take command even through the toughest North Atlantic storms!



You can also watch the action from the FLEET VIEW, an eagle's-eye look of the individual ships of a task force, or the GRAND ADMIRAL VIEW, a strategic display of your entire navy and all visible enemy vessels on a map of the North Atlantic.

Fight the entire campaign, mini-campaigns or individual battles as the British navy seeks to protect her transport ships from German predators. All the action happens in real time or you can compress the scale. There's even an instant replay feature.





This advanced simulator also boasts the dedicated attention to historical accuracy and detail for which SSI is renowned: extensive online ship data and specifications; detailed damage report by deck; even stunning cinematics to heighten the historical drama.

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IBM 256-color VGA screens.

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You witness the brutal murder of actress Sarah Carroway at the rear entrance of the Regency Theater. The shadowy, retreating figure is presumably The Ripper.

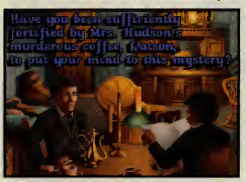
There's not much to be gained by a visit to Madame Rosa, but a return visit late in the game can reward you with a big payoff.

As in any graphic adventure or Sherlock Holmes story, the game has its share of red herrings, blind alleys, and oblique leads. Some objects are hard to find and even more difficult to figure out how to use—but not unreasonably so. *Holmes* is a game with a fine sense of balance — the nuance in conversations with Watson and other characters sometimes provides enough impetus to shift your thought into another mode of approach. All of the clue components connect very well.

221B Baker Street, a familiar sight throughout the game. Jonas, the newsstand operator, and young Wiggins, chasing a wind-blown pound note, can be of great assistance later in the game.

The interface is of the traditional point-and-click variety, strongly resembling Lucas Arts' interface rather than, say, Sierra's. When you're in a location, a twelve-button panel sits below the game screen. Here you can Look, Move, Talk, Pick Up, Open, Close, Use, or Give, and you can access Inventory, Files (for loading, saving, and quitting the game), Set Up, and Journal (Watson's Diary, which serves as a word-for-word recount of the game's events up to your current place).

A word to the wise: Look carefully in every game location, and if something doesn't seem to work with one command, try another. At one point, I was banging my head on the wall until I realized I needed Use instead of Pick Up. Exhaust your options before giving up.

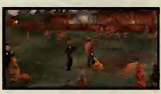


Holmes and Watson engage in some lively conversation before embarking on the case. This segment is laced with digitized speech.

The Baker Street residence is comfortable. Note the lab table in the far right corner of the room — you'll need to do some analysis here later.

At the Moongate Pub, you won't get any information unless you can beat the patrons and the publican at a game of darts.

The dart game is the only hand-eye challenge in Holmes. *Stay sharp, for each opponent is better than the last.*



The rugby coach at South Kensington Field can be rude and unsympathetic if you haven't done your homework.

Also, certain clues will send you back to locations you think you've scoured. Plan on repeat visits to certain sites, especially if you've received new information or clues since your last visit—you may have tripped a logic flag in the game's design that can, for example, offer a new line of questioning to someone with whom you thought you had finished talking.

Holmes gets very little from LeStrade at Scotland Yard. The desk sergeant, though, can grant a favor or two.

Game play is broken up in several places by animated interludes whenever you've made a significant break-

Andrew Visscher's and Bruce Williams Zaccagnino's ...

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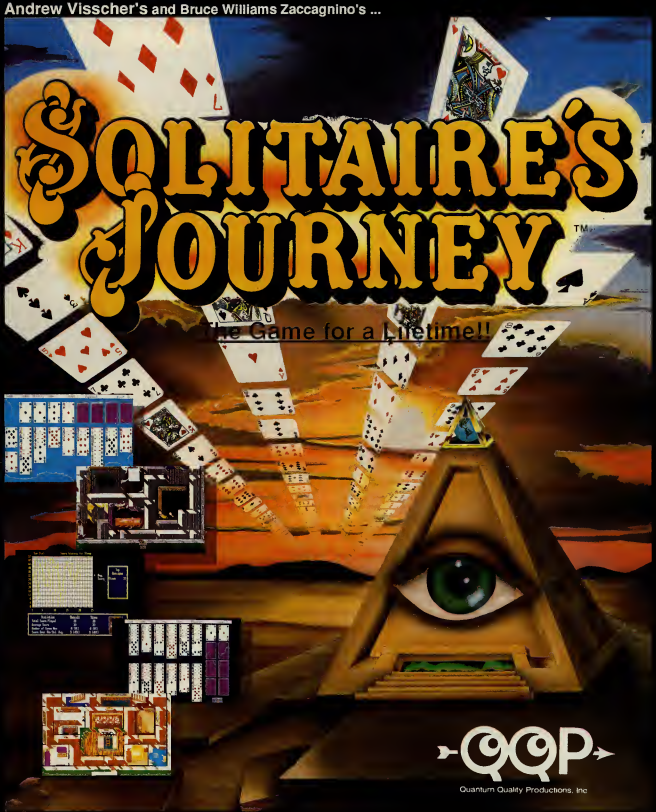

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If you want to get up to the balcony to check out a performance at the Chancery Opera House, you'll need the right tickets in your inventory.

You'll need to visit the Bow Street Police Court to interrogate these two suspects. Don't expect to get past the guard, however, without a note from Scotland Yard.

through. These are a delight, providing a cinematic recess from the point-and-click routine. Also of note is the fine soundtrack, courtesy of veteran Rob Hubbard. If you play *Holmes* without a sound card (all major models are supported), you'll miss not only speech, but also some riveting musical sequences that provide the appropriate ambience for the game segment you're in. A number of uptempo pieces in the faster-paced second half of the game practically urge you to action — Quick! Get through that door any way you can!

The lonely boy at the schoolyard is a key to the game, but getting what you need from him is a game in itself. Maybe Wiggins can help.

Surprisingly, *Holmes* is the *first* effort of its designer, R.J. Berg, head of EA's documentation group. The programming and art were done outside of EA by Mythos Software. After experiencing *Holmes*, you might think that the game was created by a veteran, award-winning team. Considering it's Berg's debut as a designer, *Holmes* is an even more astonishing achievement.

At game's end, Holmes and Watson return to Baker Street for a little chat. In the conversation, Holmes makes a not-so-subtle suggestion that another challenge lies ahead. When we asked EA about this, they wouldn't confirm another title, but they did note that a publisher doesn't go to the trouble and expense of developing a huge engine for a game like this without having some future plans. So be it. Bring on the games!

GP

Holmes and Watson are just about to arrive on the scene — just in time to witness a murder and put the killer behind bars.

The scrolling map of London with the River Thames shows locations you've visited — here Holmes embarks on a return visit to Scotland Yard.

Another brutal murder, this time at the London Zoological Gardens. Note that Holmes has his magnifying glass on the victim to find out how he died. Inspector Gregson of the Yard is little help.

Pay a visit to the flat of Sarah Carroway, the hapless murder victim. And look around carefully (the umbrella could hold an important clue).

Make it this far, and you've nearly solved the case. A look in the window tells you all you need to know. Here's hoping you've done a thorough job picking up objects early in the game.

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; 286 or better (386 or 486 recommended); 256-color VGA graphics; hard drive; supports all major sound cards (sound card recommended); supports mouse (recommended).

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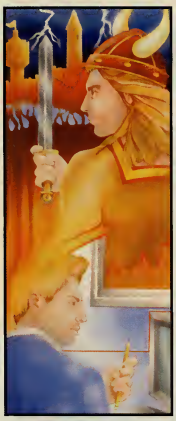
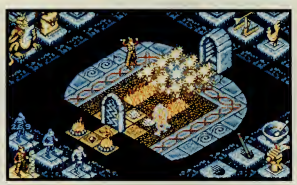


ALTERNATE LIVES

TRAZERE: A MOST WORTHY QUEST

NEIL RANDALL



If you're getting a little tired of the first-person viewpoint so popular in today's dungeon-oriented role-playing games, *The Four Crystals of Trazere*, from **Mindscape** via **The Software Toolworks**, might be just the thing for you. Its top-down, three-quarter perspective resembles the viewpoint in *Populous* and *Shadow Sorcerer*, and game play will remind you of the latter title. That's reason enough to see what this game has to offer.

Right from the start, the designers are determined to avoid some of role-playing's more complex and time-consuming conventions. You begin by creating a party of adventurers, but your options are limited to save time. One character is a berserker (fighter in other RPGs), one a troubadour (bard), one an assassin, and the fourth a runemaster (mage). You needn't worry about character race or character class, nor about which spells to memorize or skills to enhance. You have the choice of picking a character's name, as well as his or her gender, but if you accept the defaults, you'll be playing in a matter of seconds.

Trazere takes place both outdoors and inside dungeons. On the outdoor map your party is represented by a banner, which you move from place to place by clicking on your desired destination. Whenever you enter a town or other location you have several options, including purchasing items, gathering information, obtaining horses, visiting the guild, and so forth.

Your's isn't the only banner moving around the map. The blue ones are your allies, the red ones the would-be destroyers of the land of Trazere. At some point your banner will meet an enemy banner, and you'll find yourself engaged in very difficult combat, something to be avoided until you're extremely well-advanced. (The real-time nature of the conflict, by the way, is displayed on the outdoor map with a very clever graphic showing an animated sun and moon.)

Most of the game, though, takes place in the dungeons. Here you see an oblique, 3-D portrayal of the room the party is in, with doors or paths as exits. To move, just click on whichever character you want to be your leader, then click on the square you want him/her to move to. To go through a door, click on the dark square behind the door. To open a chest, click on Open from the menu, then click on the chest. To ready items such as keys and wands, click on the knapsack icon, then on the item, then on the Ready icon. The item will appear on the dungeon screen as ready in the character's left hand. Keyboard equivalents for all commands are available.

Combat occurs whenever you meet another person or thing in the dungeon (unfortunately, there are no encounters with good guys down here). To enter combat mode, click on the weapon icon, then on the Rally icon (a raised fist) if you want all characters to join battle. There's no need to direct each character once a battle begins; they'll move and fight on their own.

Controlling your runemaster takes a little practice. First, you have to create spells to cast, and it's here that *Trazere* really shines. From the dungeon screen you click on the runemaster's mixing bowl,

then add the ingredients and stir. If the ingredients are correct, you'll have a working spell. The truly fun part is figuring out how to create each spell, and what effects the spells are going to have. Once in combat, you specify which spell to cast by pressing the number key corresponding to the spell, then selecting the target square.

Trazere is a visual feast. The animation of the characters is fast and smooth (though it would be nice if they'd get out of each other's way more easily), and the rooms and items are realistically proportioned. Sometimes when you enter a room, the doors will open and enemies will come in, but you can guard against this by using the classic technique of blocking the door — a nice touch that's representative of the care that went into designing a fantasy world that's "realistic" enough to fully draw you into the quest.

The Four Crystals of Trazere is a great example of a fantasy RPG that really *works*. It's clever, and it has a great deal to offer anyone willing to take the time to master its gaming system.

GP

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THE DESKTOP GENERAL

THEATRE OF WAR: THREE-SIXTY'S ARTISTIC PORTRAYAL OF CONFLICT

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

When you view the opening screens of *Theatre of War*, you'll be confronted with a visual design quite unlike anything you've ever before seen in a traditional war game: a three-dimensional playing field, undulating like a section cut from a Moebius strip, checkered with playing squares of various shades, populated by sensuously rounded playing pieces, framed by interface "tiles" that look like pieces from an unassembled Calder mobile. The entire display, like every other screen in the game, is vividly lined in ray-traced super-VGA graphics that seduce the eye with their richness of hue and crystalline clarity. One's first, rather stunned, impression is that the design team must have been headed by Salvador Dali and E.M. Escher.

Is this a war game?

Despite its title, this new Three-Sixty release probably won't be considered one by gamers who demand realistic topography and order-of-battle authenticity (although I devoutly hope some of them will give it a try). Nevertheless, it should be welcomed as a landmark achievement by those who consider chess and its derivatives to be the root-sources of all subsequent war games — in other words, by those who consider strategy to be a legitimate branch of the philosophical arts.

Theater of War is essentially a board game with playing pieces, called "warriors," whose most important trait is not the number and pattern of squares they can cover in a move, but the various actions they can perform (movement included). There is no terrain per se, but there are three different shades of playing-square, representing rates of movement. In some scenarios, certain warriors can affect the nature of the squares they inhabit, either to thwart the enemy's movement or to strengthen defensive postures.

Games are played in real time, not turns — the enemy, be it human or computer, is advancing his strategy at the same time you are advancing yours. Beginners are advised to either play at the slowest speed, or make good use of the pause function.

Each side deploys 16 warriors per game. There are three "sets" of warriors, each roughly equivalent to a given epoch in military technology. The simplest is Medieval, in which you only have to worry about three kinds of action: sword-play, archery, and long-range catapults. The Great War set brings in pieces symbolic of machine guns, tanks, and artillery. A Contemporary scenario (by far the most challenging) incorporates "stealth" pieces, radar, missile launchers, and aircraft.

Supply lines are factored in quite logically, and the battle-worthiness of each warrior decreases with exertion, long

marches, and rapid expenditure of ammunition, be it arrows, catapult stones, or missiles. Emperor pieces can protect and replenish exhausted units, supply tents, and bases.

Units can entrench, lay or remove minefields, and perform several other specialized functions whose judicious use can spell the difference between victory and defeat. Emperors and generals can even inspire their troops to greater performance.

You can issue orders and watch the action from the 3-D screen, but until I started to get a real feel for the game, I preferred to give orders from the more conventional overhead perspective. From that vantage point, the game looks comfortingly like chess. After a time, however, as the whole gestalt of the game began to sink in, I found myself going back to the perspective screen — once you get over the initial wooziness it induces, you may come to think, as I did, that it has a certain poetic charm that the more utilitarian overhead screen lacks.

All the traditional factors and modifiers of realistic, history-based war games have been factored into *Theatre of War*, but sometimes their representation is quite subtle and cannot be detected until you become really familiar with the game. With its initially disorienting graphics, and its multitude of action-options, this isn't a game that reveals its deepest pleasures on the first date. Happily, the documentation is clear and precise, and each of the three warrior-sets contains a "Sitting Duck" scenario which lets you gain hands-on familiarity against enemy warriors who will defend themselves, but won't attack.

This is a truly different and startlingly original kind of war game. Once you become used to them, the stylized graphics add an element of pure aesthetic pleasure to the very act of manipulation. As an abstract strategy game, *Theatre of War* is exquisite in balance, rich in depth and subtlety.

Theatre of War will obviously not be every war-gamer's cup of tea, but even those who don't care for it will probably respect what its designers have achieved.

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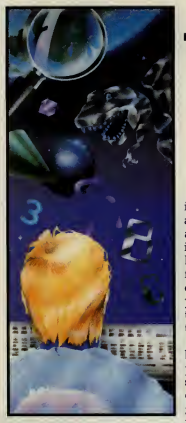


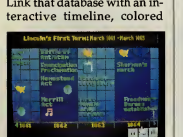
THE LEARNING GAME

INTERACTIVE TOOLS ON THE CUTTING EDGE

LESLIE EISER

There's so much talk nowadays of CD-ROM, the MPC standard, and multimedia that it can be confusing trying to figure out what it all means. But two new learning titles, *The Presidents: It All Started With George* and *Science Adventure*, make enjoying multi-media a breeze — and you don't even need a CD-ROM drive for one of them!

From **National Geographic**, home to miles and miles of some of the best video footage in the world, comes *The Presidents: It All Started With George*. Imagine an immense database filled with videos, slides, and sound-bites about our 40 different presidents. Link that database with an interactive timeline, colored icons, news "hot spots," and a mouse interface, and you've got the basic idea of *The Presidents*. Best of all, the CD-ROM format means you don't even need any space on your hard drive to reap the knowledge contained here.



The Presidents: It All Started With George

Accessing the data bank on a particular president is as simple as selecting his name. You'll discover a plethora of facts regarding his career, presented in the form of a personalized photo album containing pictures of his wife, his vice-president, important events during his term in office, his children, even his favorite pets. Attached to each picture is a short description which not only identifies the participants, but often adds a humorous note. (Did you know that Taft's bathtub was large enough to hold four ordinary men?) There's no way to search by topic, so you'll be doing a lot of flipping, learning all the while!

The extensive essays on the lives of each of the Presidents are worthwhile reading, and maps of the U.S. are used frequently to explain and summarize. Video footage of every president since the turn of the century is available, starting with silent films and ending with color footage of George Bush giving his inaugural speech in 1989. Excerpts from famous speeches are provided, some taken from live broadcasts, others spoken by narrators. There's even a collection of Presidential trivia to examine.

Icons on the timeline represent important social, cultural, and political world happenings, as well as major sport figures and sample music. Also on the timeline are "hot spots" you can click on to receive pictures and/or essays about important events in American life. Point and click to learn when the Ferris wheel was invented, to hear Martin Luther King, Jr.'s prophetic last speech, or to read about landmark court decisions such as *Roe v. Wade* and *Marbury v. Madison*.

The Presidents: It All Started With George

But what if you don't have a CD-ROM drive? You can still see the same quality of visual material with *Science Adventure*, the latest addition to the **Knowledge Adventure** series. Co-authored by the late Isaac Asimov, this package combines stunning VGA visuals, incredible sound effects (you'll need a sound card), and an unbelievable amount of quality content.

You'll know you've latched onto something unique right from the start: *Science Adventure* provides a tutorial during the 20-odd minute installation process. Each section of the main menu is explained, and there are even interactive examples. If only all install routines were this much fun to use!

The main screen is neatly divided into four sections. A large picture represents the current topic of interest, and a scrollable text window contains an essay on the topic. Above the text window is an interactive map of the world, with the location under discussion highlighted. On top of the screen are two rows of buttons. Each icon in the top row corresponds to scientific disciplines ranging from Chemistry and Physics to Technology and Space, while the bottom row provides useful functions like help, library, retrace, or sound effect.

To turn on the creative juices, click on the picture in the center of the screen. Surprising connections are used to bring up a related picture, and guessing the relationship between connected images is the challenge of *Science Adventure*. For example, if you click on an image of a magnet, the next image will be a picture of a car. Can you guess the relationship? The motor was invented by Joseph Henry, who was working in the field of electric induction at the time — a field that relies extensively on magnets.

As a free-form exploration into the relationships between scientific ideas and time, *Science Adventure* isn't a game, but it sure isn't boring either. But if it seems like *too* much education, don't worry — the glorious images alone are worth a trip with the *Science Adventure*.

GP

Photos courtesy of Joseph H. Bailey, @ National Geographic Society

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ACES OF THE PACIFIC

STEPHEN POOLE

Stay low enough to avoid flak, and you'll wind up taking your torpedo plane right into the teeth of the enemy guns after releasing your payload.

When Dynamix released *Red Baron* back at the start of 1991, nearly everyone praised it for its authenticity, excellent animation, superb artificial-intelligence routines, and user-friendly design. With more fine-tuning options than you could shake a joystick at, *Red Baron* could be fully enjoyed by anyone, from flight-sim novices to fanatics. The editors here at *Game Players* were unanimous in their respect and admiration for what head designer Damon Slye and the team at Dynamix accomplished with *Red Baron*, and we subsequently voted it Best Simulation for 1991.

Not long after the release of *Red Baron*, word got out that Dynamix had begun work on *Aces of the Pacific*, a simulation of WWII air combat in the Pacific, and the mouths of PC pilots everywhere began to water. Being able to fly the Fokkers, Neuports, and Sopwiths of WWI was great, but for many flight-sim fans the planes of WWII hold an appeal that's unmatched by aircraft from any other era.

Other games — *Their Finest Hour*, *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*, and *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe*, to name a few — put you in the cockpits of WWII planes. But all the action in those titles takes place in the European Theater. *Aces of the Pacific* is the first flight sim centered solely on the monumental struggle between the U.S. and Japan, a war in which air power was the single most decisive factor in determining ultimate victory. After several delays, *Aces of the Pacific* is finally on store shelves, and unless something *very* impressive comes out in the next few months, Dynamix stands a good chance of winning our Best Simulation award for the second year in a row.

If variety is the spice of flight, *Aces of the Pacific* has been seasoned to perfection. As with *Red Baron*, *Aces* lets you fly for either of the opposing powers in the Pacific Theater, and you can fly in the Navy, Marines, or Army Air Force (Japan's branches are limited to Navy and Army).

Just scanning the list of planes you'll be flying is enough to get any PC combat pilot excited. U.S. fighter mounts include the P-38 Lightning, F4F Wildcat, P-39 Airacobra, F6F Hellcat, P-40 Warhawk, F4U Corsair, P-47 Thunderbolt, and the P-51 Mustang; Devastators, Avengers, Dauntlesses, and Helldivers make up the torpedo and dive bombers. The list of Japanese fighters is equally impressive: Zeros, Nates, Georges, Oscars, Tonys, Nicks, and Franks are all here, along with Kates, Judys, Vals, and Jills.

And there's no skimping on the missions, either. Like *Red Baron*, the key to instant gratification is the Fly Single Mission menu. Once there you

At times, flak from American warships can be as devastating as enemy fighters.

can choose to go head-to-head against a Japanese or an American ace, dogfight a squadron, fly combat air patrol, intercept bombers, make

When flying the sluggish torpedo and dive bombers, it's essential to heed your rear gunner's instructions.

Pan the external view to get a better look at your handiwork.

anti-shipping strikes or ground attack runs, and so forth. After you've picked a mission, you can tweak it by changing planes (for one or both sides), altering weather conditions, selecting the weapons load of your choice, and setting the level of

Create your own war movie with the Mission Recorder.

expertise of the enemy pilots.

The torpedo and dive-bombing sorties are particularly challenging. Stuck in a slow, cumbersome plane — often without fighter protection — just reaching the target can be extremely tough. If you do make it, you've still got to line up your dive or torpedo run accurately in the face of flak (although it's somewhat sparse, especially if you're flying against American ships).

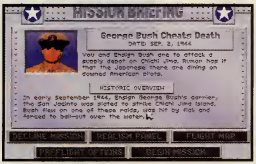
Also on the Single Mission menu is Fly a Historic Mission. The extensive list is broken down into Japanese and American campaigns, beginning with Pearl Harbor and Wake Island and ending with the final assault on the Japanese mainland. There are over 50 missions taken straight from the war, though only three involve the U.S. Marines or Army, and none involving the Japanese Army.

The Historic Missions don't give you control over every variable as with the other single missions, but on *any* flight in *Aces* you can set the level of realism to suit your experience, with toggles for gun jams, blackouts, limited fuel, midair collisions, limited ammo, realistic weather, and more. Another way to fine-tune a historic mission is to change the difficulty of combat. Set it to Easy, and enemy planes are easier to hit and down; set it on Standard, and everything's just as it was in real life.

The artificial intelligence programming in *Aces of the Pacific* is fantastic. Sneak up behind a Zero and miss with the first burst from your guns, and he'll start pulling off aerial acrobatics that will make your jaw drop. As a Japanese pilot going against Wildcats very early in the war, you'll see Americans who've obviously been trained in WWI dog-fighting techniques. And the enemy will utilize any possible advantage: if you're told there are bogeys near by but you can't spot any, they're probably diving out of the sun or slowly climbing up unobserved on your six.

One of the best features of *Red Baron* is its Career mode, and the concept has been expanded and improved for *Aces of the Pacific*. Join either side at various points during the war, then choose a particular campaign and squadron. Realistically, the Career missions can sometimes be long and boring (should you tire of formation flying, however, the autopilot feature zooms you painlessly to the next waypoint), or short and hairy, with plenty of fireworks. At certain points, your fellow pilots will offer advice on tactics or relay the scoop on new planes.

The flight models for all the planes are quite authentic. The heavy Thunderbolt performs incredible power dives, while it takes only one mission in (or against) a Zero to realize why it was considered of the best pure dogfighters in World War II. You'll rue the ungainly Helldiver, and wonder just who made the decision to leave



The Historic Missions are fascinating. This one features someone who's currently involved in a different sort of dogfight.

In Career mode, your buddies back at the base will give you hints on tactics.

forward-firing guns off the Kate. Each plane has its own design quirks and distinctive flight characteristics, forcefully imparting the experience of having to do the best you can with a mediocre craft (or learning to exploit a hot-rod plane to its fullest potential).

That's where the manual comes into the picture. There's a goldmine of information in the more than 220 pages, so much so that it could easily be packaged as a stand-alone reference source. It includes a complete history of the war in the Pacific, full-color plates of all the major aircraft (accompanied by a list of performance and firepower specs), a primer on flight basics, a thorough explanation of air combat tactics, instructions for performing various maneuvers, and a simple, step-by-step guide to every aspect of this massive simulation.

Read and study the tactics guide carefully. It correlates maneuvers to planes, telling you the best tactics for the aircraft you're flying; learning and following these basics will lengthen your career considerably. So your squadron of Wildcats has run into some Georges? If you've studied the manual, you'll know to avoid a traditional dogfight at all costs, opting instead for a slashing, hit-and-run attack. If you're in a Zero, on the other hand, you should tempt the more heavily armored American fighters to give in to their instincts and try to turn with you.

At mission's end, you're asked if you want to save it to tape. The Mission Recorder (i.e., VCR) is taken straight from *Red Baron*, and it's one of the best around. Watch the action from the usual angles inside your cockpit, as well as unlimited viewpoints outside it. You can also switch to the perspective of another aircraft or ship, or you can place a camera in one spot: thanks to zoom and pan features, the possibilities are virtually endless.

How does *Aces* look? If you played *Red Baron*, you've a good idea what to expect. The ground and ocean graphics are somewhat flat (*Chuck Yeager's Air Combat* still gets my vote for

It's mentioned several times in the manual, but it bears repeating: if you're flying as an American early in the war, don't turn with a Zero!

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A lot of listening went into LINKS 386 Pro.

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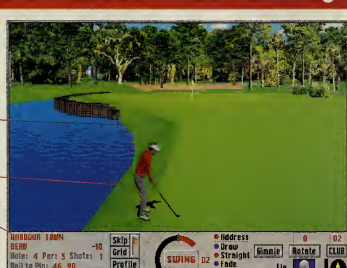
Male and female golfers.

You can use any of the 7 existing LINKS courses or upgrade your favorite course to the Super VGA version.



Over 345 combinations of Viewing Windows.

With the new *LINKS 386 Pro* you're not stuck with just one standard viewing window. With a few clicks of your mouse you can split the screen giving you a real-time reverse view of your shot to the green or add a scaleable top-view that displays the flight of your ball. Scorecard, club distance chart, terrain profile and other panels give you the flexibility to display what you want to view while playing and you can change your viewing setup at anytime!

*Actual Links 386 Pro Super VGA Screens

ACCESS SOFTWARE INCORPORATED

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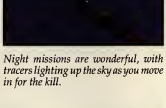
Now that's more like it! A diving, slashing attack — preferably from the rear and out of the sun — is the best approach against the more maneuverable Japanese planes.

most convincing ground detail), but the rendering of aircraft is very good, especially when set for the highest level of detail. At that setting, things can get very choppy on anything less than a 486/33. The minimum platform for *Aces* is a 386SX with 2 megs of RAM (and DOS 5.0), but the frame rate on that setup would be very slow. From our experience, we'd recommend playing *Aces* on at least a 386/25. On a 486, *Aces* is astoundingly smooth.

I've played *Aces of the Pacific* for dozens and dozens of hours, and though I'm nowhere close to tiring of it, I've found several peculiarities in some of the missions. For one thing, you can take off *through* the superstructure of an aircraft carrier, even with total realism on. And ground attacks are great fun, though I've yet to see *any* enemy fire from the AAA emplacements around the targets.

Still, the scope of this simulation is so amazingly



Night missions are wonderful, with tracers lighting up the sky as you move in for the kill.

broad that you can easily forgive it these minor oddities. If you enjoy air combat — and have the necessary hardware — *Aces of the Pacific* is a must.

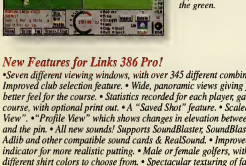
Ground attacks are fun, but relatively easy — you won't encounter any fire from the enemy's antiaircraft artillery.

GP

Hardware requirements: 2 megs RAM and DOS 5.0; 386SX or better; hard drive; VGA graphics; supports all major sound boards; supports Thrustmaster Flight Control Stick and Weapons Control System; supports mouse and joystick.

by the game itself.

Improved swing indicator to allow for more accurate putting.



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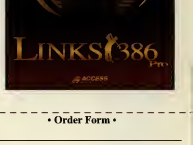

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Equipment required:

PC with 386 sx/16MHz CPU or better. • 2 MB of memory (RAM) • Hard disk drive with 13 MB free. (*LINKS 386 Pro* requires 5 MB and temporary playing files use up to 8 MB) • Microsoft compatible mouse. Super VGA video card and monitor capable of 640x400 or 640x480 resolution in 256 colors.

DUNE

T. LIAM MACDONALD

The opening sequence introduces you to many of the important characters you'll meet later on — and offers a glimpse of some very impressive graphics.

The year is 10191; the place, a planet called Arrakis, also known as Dune. Few species can survive the uncompromising climate of this war-torn frontier world, where wealth and power depend almost entirely on the control of a single commodity — "spice," a substance crucial to interplanetary navigation.

The late science-fiction author Frank Herbert created this complex world as a setting for *Dune*, the story of the Atreides family and their battle for control of the inhospitable world. It was a Greek tragedy on a universal scale, and the multiple worlds and high drama that Frank Herbert created would make *Dune* and its sequels some of the bestselling sci-fi books of all time. But the richly detailed and intricate world of *Dune* didn't appeal to the public when translated to film: director David Lynch's rendering of Herbert's vision was one of the biggest flops in movie history.

Arrakis is an extremely inhospitable place, with the threat of a painful death always present.

Now comes the game *Dune*, developed by the French programmers at **Cryo** and distributed by **Virgin Games**. Because it's based on both the books and the movie, one question springs to mind: does it bang like the books or flop like the flick? Sci-fi gamers will be happy to know it's mostly bang, but there a few fizzles which dilute the excitement.

In *Dune*, an interstellar empire under the control of Emperor Shaddam IV is served by various feudal houses. When the House of Atreides is given the right to mine spice on Arrakis, their sworn enemies, the Harkonnen, are enraged. They have been the only House mining the valuable substance, using the Fremen — the indigenous population of Dune — as slave labor. The Fremen are a tribal people that have managed to survive on Dune through careful rationing and collection of water, using "stillsuits" to recycle bodily fluids. They wait in hope of a prophet to save them and turn their planet into a flourishing paradise. Except for sandworms, which grow to lengths of hundreds of yards, and a few smaller species, they are the only naturally occurring life on the planet.

This is only a hint of the dense, multilayered world created by Frank Herbert in his novels and, to a large extent, admirably re-created in Lynch's film adaptation and this software adventure. The game documentation does a fine job of laying out these basics and setting up the scenario that will be involved in game play, thanks to concise, relatively clear language that gets the player over the hump of learning about this new world. One unwelcome addition is five pages of bios of the game's designers plopped into the middle of the manual. (With names like Sohor Ty and Stephane Picq, I thought these were bios of characters in the game!)

Dune does a good job gradually introducing you to the world of Dune and its major players. You play Paul Atreides, son of Duke Leto and Lady Jessica. You have friends and advisors, and up to two of them can join you in your travels. This works well, though interaction with the characters could have been a little more pronounced.

The introductory sequence is attractive, but rather choppy and incoherent. What does it tell us about the story? Nothing. It merely shows you some characters' faces with intermittent cuts to a screen of Paul Atreides (he's supposed to resemble actor Kyle McLachlan, but looks more like George Hamilton) arching his eyebrows seductively at the player. If it were a film, the edi-

tors would have gotten the boot.

Despite the choppiness of the animation in the intro, the graphics in *Dune* are still top-flight and distinctive, with a stylish blend of muted and bright colors. The feel and look of Duneworld is wonderfully evoked, and a mouse-driven, map-based interface makes navigating all the locations a snap. Changes of day to night to day again are attractively rendered, and (in combination with an icon) make you keenly aware of the passage of time.

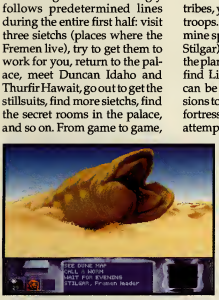
The first location is the palace, where you meet the major players. The dialogue in these introductory screens is rather awkward (for example, "I am Gurney Halleck, I served the Atreides Family for a very long time"), and no attempt is made to reveal the admittedly important information through gradual exposition. Interaction is limited to "Talk With Me," "Come with Me," and "Stop Talking."

The game unswervingly follows predetermined lines during the entire first half: visit three sietchs (places where the Fremen live), try to get them to work for you, return to the palace, meet Duncan Idaho and Thurfir Hawait, go out to get the stillsuits, find more sietchs, find the secret rooms in the palace, and so on. From game to game, the locations of people and the different tribes don't change; a little variation in the order of events and location of characters would have significantly increased replayability.

It's important to convince Stilgar to join your cause. Without him, the Fremen won't wage war against the Harkonnen.

Paul moves about in an ornithopter, a birdlike helicopter, by choosing a destination on a map of the planet. You can forego the animated flight sequence to your destination, but if you do you risk missing important sights on the surface. Later, Paul can ride sandworms to the various locations.

The story is interesting enough to keep the gamer involved while the strategic element becomes more and more important. As you discover more sietchs and more Fremen tribes, you are able to rally more troops. These troops can either mine spice, fight (after you find Stilgar), or work transforming the planet ecologically (after you find Liet Kynes). Some troops can be sent on espionage missions to find hidden Harkonnen fortresses which you can then attempt to conquer. Prospecting new sietchs for spice, mining the spice, and then converting the mined land for cultivation is an important part of the game. Ecological success raises Paul's charisma rating, making the Fremen more productive, happier, and better fighters. Determining the correct balance between mining enough spice to appease a greedy emperor, "greening" the planet, and finding and fighting the Harkonnen is a crucial part of the second half of the game. Yes, there's an ecological message to the game (success depends on converting the arid land), but it's true to the book, and adds an intriguing dimension to an already interesting game.



The giant sandworms of Arrakis are dangerous, but the Fremen have learned to use them for transportation.

The music is a decent knockoff of Kraftwerk-style fare, and sound effects are limited to machinery — not a big drawback, since there really isn't much need for sound anyway. (Turning off the music, however, also seems to turn off the sound effects.) There's a helpful autosave function that returns you to the last room entered or the last sietch discovered. Two other save spots are included, though more would have been welcome.

Dune *borrows many images from its movie predecessor.*

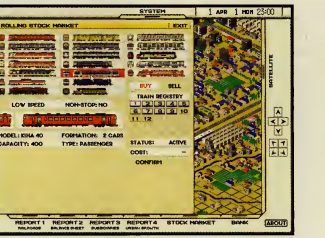
Frank Herbert put a lot of imagination and thought into his Duneworld, and the people at Cryo have done an admirable job of recreating it as an adventure game. The deep strategy involved in assigning priorities to the game's various elements more than compensates for the linear game play. *Dune* is a unique game overflowing with detail and imagination, one that handily surpasses most other science-fiction games on the market.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA graphics; hard drive; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster, and compatible sound cards; supports mouse.

A-TRAIN

NEIL RANDALL



The Rolling Stock Market menu lets you purchase the trains you'll need to make your business grow. Each type of train has its own strengths and weaknesses.

Four years ago, a company called Artdink released *Railroad Empire*, a fast-playing simulation of setting up and running a railroad system within a limited geographical area. Despite some flaws, it worked quite well, but unfortunately for Artdink the game was immediately overshadowed by the near-simultaneous release of Microprose's *Railroad Tycoon*. *Railroad Tycoon* quickly became known as one of the finest games ever released for the PC, and *Railroad Empire* never really got the attention it deserved.

Now *Railroad Empire* is back, but this time with a new name, a new look, a new feel, and, perhaps most importantly, a new distributor. The game is now in the hands of **Maxis Software**, who has established a reputation for delivering extremely strong simulation software. There aren't many PC gamers who haven't heard of *SimCity* or *SimEarth*, the company's two best-known products, and anyone who likes those games will naturally be interested in whatever Maxis offers. *Railroad Empire* is now called *A-Train*, but *SimStation* might be more fitting.

The Scheduling menu is probably the most important in the game. From here you determine the departure times for each train from each station, then set the switches to make it all happen.

We'll start with a word about the manual, because manuals don't get (or often deserve) much attention. This one is well written, concise, and, on top of it all, genuinely funny. Most humor in documentation fades after the first read, but this stuff stays quite fresh. Nicely done, and more than a little welcome.

Essentially, *A-Train* puts you in the role of CEO of a railroad company, and you'll make your fortune by using the railroad to establish a prosperous community. The keys to success include laying track; buying freight and passenger trains; building stations; buying land and constructing apartments, factories, commercial developments, and entertainment complexes; and, if you find time, playing the stock market.

The game comes with six scenarios, each one based on a specific map with its own characteristics. The first map represents a small suburban area with good growth potential, while the sixth represents a fully developed city. Also available are an underpopulated resort development, a largely populated harbor area, and a poorly developed multicity district. All have their own challenges, and all can be replayed many times. Presumably, Maxis will supplement the game with additional maps, as they've done with add-on disks for *SimCity*.

The 3-D style map takes up the majority of the screen display. Buildings, trees, waterways, roads, and rails are all clearly visible, especially in the high-res (640x480) 16-color VGA mode. As with *SimEarth* and, to a lesser extent, *SimCity*, the game menus are located not along the top, as with most GUI menus, but rather around the edges of the map.

Move the mouse pointer to the top center, for instance, and you'll highlight the System menu; move it to the right, and you'll get the Satellite menu. To the left are the heavily used Trains and Subsidiaries menus, used to buy trains, lay tracks, set schedules, purchase real estate, and construct everything from factories to golf courses. To the right are the cursor arrows, used to scroll the map, while the menus at the bottom let you work the stock market, visit the bank for a loan, and access the four available reports.

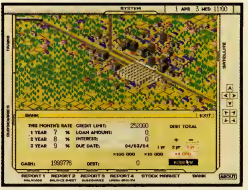
The menu layout is unusual at first, but it becomes second nature so quickly that it brings questions about why more games don't use it. Actually, the Trains and Subsidiaries menus can be minimized to a series of icons along the left side of the map.

Using this interesting and functional interface, you place rail lines and buildings in strategic locations in an effort to let the simulation's artificial intel-

ligence build the community around you. A community needs transportation, materials, and jobs, and with all of them it will populate itself and spur more growth. The economic basis of this game is the centrality of the rail system, a concept which harkens back to the days when rail was king.

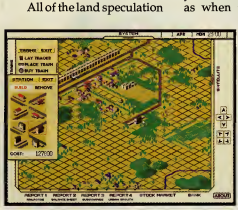
As the game opens, you already have some assets: at least one station and a train bringing materials from the outside. Your job is to look at the map and figure out where to set additional rail lines, or, in the more advanced scenarios, how best to maintain existing lines and turn them to profitability. On map #1, for instance, you are given the nucleus of a small town, with a station smack-dab in the downtown core. By laying new track toward the southern areas of the region, you work toward establishing a suburban community that will use your trains to commute into the city center. For a while the number of commuters will be small, but as the city grows — largely as a result of your acquisition and development of the land — you'll see the passenger base grow with it.

All of the land speculation and stock marketing is interesting and essential, but in many ways the real fun of this game is getting the railroads built and the trains moving. Using the menus on the left side of the display, you lay the tracks and get the trains moving on a schedule that guarantees greatest service to the community, and thus greatest profitability to you. Laying track is simply a matter of dragging a line with the mouse; you'll be told if the placement is wrong. Small or large stations are available, the former less expensive but the latter capable of nurturing stronger urban growth. You must place the stations at useful distances, which requires that you keep a close eye on your train schedules.



At the bottom of this screen is the Bank menu. Head here to arrange loans for financial expansion, but keep an eye on your interest payments.

Scheduling involves setting arrival and departure times for each train from each station, as well as ensuring that the switches on the tracks are set correctly for each train. You have full control over where your trains actually go, as well as when they go there, and while setting schedules isn't difficult it requires a considerable amount of trial and error. The best idea is usually to buy both a passenger and a freight train and lay two tracks leading from the single inner-city track to an outlying station. Then set the passenger train for morning departure and evening return, in an attempt to secure the greatest number of passengers. The freight train can run at night or, if the distances, train speed, and track layout are right, back and forth with one-hour stops.



The Station menu lets you build and place stations on the map. There are only two types -- small or large -- but be sure the diagonal direction is correct.

Scheduling is the most challenging aspect of *A-Train*, a difficulty exacerbated by the fact that the graphics aren't realistically scaled — trains, houses, buildings, and stations are far too large graphically for the scale of the land represented, and this discrepancy takes some getting used to. But *A-Train* is an extremely interesting city-building game, and so different from *Railroad Tycoon* that the two don't actually compete. If you're a railroad buff, you'll want both.

Changing to the Quick menu sets up the icons at the left side of the screen. At the right is the Satellite view, which shows how many passengers are using your lines.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; 286 or better; hard disk; VGA, MCGA, EGA, or Hercules graphics; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Covox SoundMaster, Roland MT-32, Tandy sound; mouse highly recommended.

GATEWAY

GARY MEREDITH

Thom Seldridge tries to play it cool, barely acknowledging your presence at first. Just remember the old Nash poem, "candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker."

It's the early 22nd century, and free enterprise is alive and well — at least for those who have the nerve to take on the mysteries of the Gateway. Half-a-million years ago, a race known as the Heechee disappeared, leaving behind a huge space station, the Gateway, to be found by the eternally inquisitive humans in the middle of the 21st century. The station was still fully functional, and more; it contained 1,000 faster-than-light ships.

Overnight, mankind had access to the stars, and the riches to be found among them. There was just one catch, however. The FTL ships were programmed by the Heechee, and the destination codes amounted to nothing more than a crap shoot for any prospector with the guts to roll the dice. Most took off and never returned, but for the few who did, the rewards were unbelievable.

Frederik Pohl's Gateway is a wonderfully detailed adaptation of Pohl's popular series of novels. Pohl, now one of the grand old men of science fiction, has been delving into the mysteries of the Heechee for many years, and now it's your turn to root among their artifacts. You begin as the winner of a lottery on Earth which stakes you to a one-way ticket to Gateway, and the chance to make your fortune. The odds are against you, but with a little luck, and some shrewd networking — yes, they still do it in 2101 — you should be able to tilt things a bit in your favor.

You'll definitely need that gun, much later on, but the guard won't let you take it out of the Armory. You need to enlist the help of a mechanical ally to carry the weapon to another room.

After awaking in your room, you pick up your meager belongings and head out for Heecheetown, and your rendezvous with destiny. If you've taken the time to read your messages on the Commset, you'll know where to go. (Don't forget to make a thorough search of your quarters before you leave.) From then on it's a matter of following the sometimes subtle leads with which you're provided, combined with a little deductive reasoning — and a lot of patience.

Much like **Legend Entertainment**'s early games, such as *Spellcasting 101*, you'll find yourself frequently waiting around for people to show up, *then* waiting for them to say something useful once they do arrive. It may take a while for some of the characters to get around to the salient points, but just keep listening and you'll eventually unearth some real gems of info.

After demonstrating your proficiency at piloting a Heechee starship, and a little friendly persuasion with your supervisor, you'll find yourself enrolled in the Orion Project. This gives you slightly better odds at finding riches, but also increases the difficulty of your missions.

The traditional rules of graphic adventure gaming apply to *Frederik Pohl's Gateway*: look everywhere, talk to everyone, save often, and most importantly, think creatively. A seemingly insurmountable

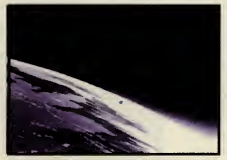
You could probably spend a couple of years trying to figure out what the Mutzers are saying. For now, however, you just need the cylinder key. Follow them back to their village, and then find a slithery way to distract the Chief.

The Octagonal Maze room on Aurigae 6 is another place where a bit of art education, or maybe physics, would come in handy. Think about mnemonic memory aids and the colors of the spectrum.

problem usually just needs a little twist in your thinking. A case in point is the Armory, where you must secure a weapon. Everything has seemed relatively benign up to this point, and after a few attempts to sneak the gun past the guard, you may be tempted to give up and pray you won't need it. After all, there are lots of items to pick up that you'll probably never need. But you *will* need the gun. The idea is to get someone else, or something else, to take it out of the Armory, to a place where you can collect it later. If you've done any exploring of the air-duct system in Heecheetown, you'll know that service robots roam the narrow corridors. If you can figure out a way of summoning one, you might get it to smuggle a weapon out for you. So just how persuasive are you with robotic mechanisms?

Anyone who has played other Legend games will be very familiar with the interface, with its multiple windows giving you all the info you need. The game can be played with mouse, but it's often quicker to just type in the command, rather than searching for all the sentence segments with the cursor. There is one advantage to this sort of interface. All items in a scene are inventoried for you, but more importantly, all the verbs you might use are listed on the screen. Scrolling through these can really help when you're stuck as to what to do with some strange object.

Legend has the best EGA graphics in the business. You'll find yourself wondering how they can get such subtle shadings with only 16 colors. If you have VGA, however, you get some bonus screens to enjoy. The animated segue screens for space flight, as well as the dialogue screens, are an added 256-color treat, even though all the essential gaming is done with the normal screens. And RealSound has been added for players without soundboards.



All ships systems are automatic once the Heechee codes have been entered into the instrument panel. Once you've entered orbit around the planet, hit the landing switch.

To get the pin you need for entry at the Pedroza Lounge, solve the Virtual Reality Beach puzzle. It's also good practice for the endgame.

Frederik Pohl's Gateway is a real gem, with the usual Legend playability, sharp design, and sense of humor wedded to Pohl's wonderful original concept. And the designers have thrown in a lot of little puzzles and games, such as the Old Earth Trivia game, just to keep things interesting. The idea of a gateway to different worlds has been the inspiration for science fiction writers from Wells to Ellison. We've yet to run into any Heechee artifacts with the space shuttle, but you can get the jump on NASA with *Frederik Pohl's Gateway.*

GP

Rolf Becker is one of the legendary Gateway prospectors, but what is he doing way out here on Nemira 3? Listen to him, and then follow him to his house. If you can't find where he's run off to, just give a little whistle at the nearest bird's nest.

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM for SVGA, VGA, or EGA graphics, 512K for MCGA, CGA, or Tandy graphics; high-density disk drive; suports AdLib, Roland, and Sound Blaster sound cards; mouse optional.

LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS 2

STEPHEN POOLE

Humorous touches are sprinkled throughout the stylized graphics in Leather Goddesses.

All right, I'll admit it up front: I wasn't playing PC games back when **Infocom**'s classic text adventures were first released. (In fact, I had yet to learn how to boot a computer.)

When I finally did try my hand at adventure gaming a few years back, I asked one of our editors what games he recommended. He asked if I'd ever played any Infocom games, and when I said no, he immediately began to rave about games like *Zork*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and *Leather Goddesses of Phobos* with a zeal that had me convinced before he'd even finished speaking.

It turned out that those Infocom games were *so* popular around the office that there were none left for me to try out. So you can imagine how excited I was to learn that the newly revamped **Activision** was releasing *Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2* (subtitled *Gas Pump Girls Meet The Pulsating Inconvenience from Planet X*). Finally, here was my chance to experience an Infocom game, a sequel to a classic, in a format right in step with the current trends in graphics, interface, and sound. I figured if it turned out to be half as good as the descriptions I'd heard of the old Infocom games, I had a real winner on my hands. It seemed too good to be true....

And as the saying goes, if it seems too good to be true, it probably is. That's not to say *LGOP2* is a bad game; in all fairness, it does many things better than a lot of other graphic adventures you could buy. But it has one major problem that can't be overcome by even the best graphics or sound effects: it's just too short and too easy.

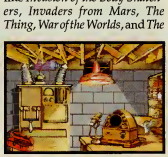
You won't be tipped off to the game's brevity during the installation process. *LGOP2* comes on *ten* 1.2 MB diskettes, and takes up around 15 megs on your hard disk once all the files are unpacked. With that much disk space, you'd expect a huge world to explore and tons of problems and puzzles to solve. But once you've thoroughly cruised all four streets in tiny Atom City, Nevada, of 1956, you've seen about 90 percent of the game.

The plot of *LGOP2* has potential, especially for folks who appreciate cheap sci-fi movies from the fifties. A spaceship from "Planet X" has crashed on the outskirts of Atom City, and its occupant — Barthgub el Nikki-Nikki, son of Jelgobar el Zayda-Zayda, or Barth for short — has struck out in search of equipment to repair his damaged ship. You can play as one of three characters: Zeke Zarden, the ruggedly handsome gas-station owner; Lydia Sandler, the beautiful daughter of the local scientist and alien sympathizer Dr. Sandler; or Barth.

It's not Barth the earth has to worry about, though. It's the Leather Goddesses of Phobos, who plan on tricking us into thinking that Planet X is going to invade, then launching their own attack as we thank them for their help. To win the game as Zeke or Lydia, you travel to Planet X and Phobos in search of evidence that will convince the thickheaded officials on Earth that Phobos is the real threat. As Barth, you've got to find the parts to repair your ship in order to make the journey.

Most of Atom City's residents have gotten their notions of extraterrestrials from science-fiction flicks, and it's fun spotting references to classics like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Invaders from Mars*, *The Thing*, *War of the Worlds*, and *The*

Reverend Layberry's digitized rant is one of the few cases where the lines are delivered effectively, but it doesn't hold any useful information.



Go ahead, pull that lever! You can't die in LGOP2, *so give in to your adventurer's urge to use any item you come across.*

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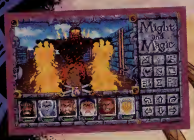

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Dig out your 3-D glasses before heading to Atom City's only theater.

Incredible Shrinking Man. There's even a 3-D sci-fi movie playing at the local theater (yes, it's *really* 3-D — go ahead and dig out those red-and-blue glasses, because there's another 3-D sequence further along in the game).

For the most part, the fifties motif is sustained very well. The screen for saving/loading games and making adjustments in sound and graphics display is called the "Play-O-Matic," represented by a colorful jukebox. (Nearly every item in Professor Sandler's house has "O-Matic" appended to it — Cupboard-O-Matic, Toast-O-Matic, and so on.) The Nixon-Eisenhower bulletin board and the town's gratitude for the "blessing" of atomic power are fitting, and the general who commands the nearby Army base is naturally anti-communist and, by logical extension, anti-alien.

But there's one aspect of *LGOP2* that's definitely *not* lifted from that innocent era: sex, and plenty of it. It's not that the sex scenes are sprung on you without warning; one look at the title and the box art should let you know that there's going to some naughtiness here. And most players won't consider this stuff to be remotely pornographic. Though you're fully aware that the "act" is taking place, we've all seen a lot more graphic stuff on soap operas and prime time TV.

Thoughtful attendants like Doe keep Zeke's service station in business.

You get your first glimpse of Planet X through Professor Sandler's telescope.

The problem is that the sex doesn't really fit the setting of the game — it's been ladled on top of the plot like so much gravy, obscuring the game's stronger elements. As Zeke, you'll have "trysts" with several women, but your romancing doesn't advance the plot or gain you any valuable items.

And your sexual "adventures" as Lydia are even more absurd because they're completely out of character. She won't kiss her true love Zeke, but with a slew of other fellows she's like a rabbit in heat, giving herself up at the drop of a hat (or feather, in the case of the stereotyped Indian who stands guard outside the reservation on the edge of town). It could be argued that limiting the ribald escapades to Zeke would have been somewhat sexist, but it's best to keep a straight face when you're spoofing the fab fifties, even if it means you're not politically correct for the nineties.

As noted, *LGOP2* has several features that are clever and appreciated. The game is structured so you can't die or box yourself into a corner, so you won't find yourself replaying a large chunk of the game to retrieve an object or perform an action you overlooked. (This feature, however, makes the 20 save-game slots unnecessary; three slots — one for each character — would have been sufficient).

For players without sound cards, Infocom has included the "LifeSize Sound Enhancer," which lets you hear the digitized speech accompanying all written dialogue through a printer port (the game supports similar devices such as the Covox Speech Thing and the Disney Sound Source). The cartoonlike VGA graphics are more than adequate for the lighthearted nature of the game, and unlike some graphic adventures the screen redraws are surprisingly fast. Anyone who has played a recent graphic adventure will have the point-and-click interface down pat in a matter of seconds.

But unless you're a total greenhorn, you won't get a chance to really relish these features: *LGOP2* is a very short game. It might seem as though there's a lot to explore in town, but you'll probably find everything you need on your second pass. After solving only a couple of moderately challenging puzzles on Earth, you head for Planet X (three or four screens), then Phobos (another four or five screens). There's a map you can grab to help guide you, but Atom City is so small that you can easily get by without it.

Why is a 15-meg game so lacking in scenery and difficulty? Much of that disk space is undoubtedly taken up by the digitized speech, but sadly the spoken dialogue which accompanies the static closeups of each character adds little or no excitement to the game. I would gladly trade all that speech for more problems to solve and locales to visit, and I suspect that most players will feel the same way.

If Activision can incorporate the challenge of the old Infocom games into the *Leather Goddesses 2* engine, the result could be a game that novices and veterans alike can fully enjoy. We'll just have to wait and see.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA or EGA graphics; 10 Mhz or faster machine; supports all major sound cards, and the LifeSize Sound Enhancer; supports mouse (recommended).

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GLOBAL EFFECT

JEFF SEIKEN

Here's an intriguing recipe: take the city building of *SimCity* and the environmental sculpting of *SimEarth*, add a pinch of *Populous*, stir vigorously, and — voila! — you have *Global Effect* by U.K.-based **Millennium.**

Global Effect is an ambitious game of considerable scope and numerous possibilities. The basic object is to establish a thriving civilization without upsetting the delicate balance of nature. But from this concept springs three quite different modes of play, each with its own bundle of options.

In "Create A World," you begin with a planet that's uninhabited and in pristine condition — in other words, a true *tabula rasa*. "Save A World," on the other hand, challenges you to restore the ecosystem of a world that's already been ravaged by manmade calamity. And then there's "Rule A World," which pits one civilization against another in a battle for economic and military dominance.

Restore a planet ravaged by mankind's wasteful practices in "Save a World" mode.

The first scenario is the most open-ended, offering you the widest range of variations. You attempt to colonize any of eight distinct worlds, each with widely different environmental characteristics, or you can custom-design a planet to suit your own tastes. In addition, you can choose to play this scenario as either a solitary exercise or as a two-player affair using a null-modem cable hook up. And if a live opponent is lacking, the computer can always fill in.

Because of its emphasis on city construction, *Global Effect* bears more than a passing resemblance to *SimCity*. After establishing a power generator, you proceed to erect the city around it in building-block fashion. As your settlement expands, you'll be required to furnish various services, such as sewage treatment plants and recycling facilities. At the same time, you'll have to keep tabs on how the environment is weathering these developments, as large-scale urban growth can usher in a host of environmental ills, most notably increased pollution and carbon-dioxide levels.

Global Effect *requires you to build economically viable cities without despoiling the environment.*

Your ability to do virtually anything in the game is regulated by the power meter, which functions more or less like a treasury. You expend power by performing actions; you gain it back according to your economic and environmental ratings. The better you do in both departments, the more power you have to use. Therefore, in order to prosper, you need to strike a balance between urban expansion and environmental preservation. Spend unwisely and you'll soon find yourself bankrupt, bringing the game to an early end.

Military conflict adds a whole extra dimension to play, and practically constitutes a game unto itself. The mere fact that a potential for hostilities exists complicates planning considerably, requiring you to budget some share of your power toward erecting installations for attack and defense — the age-old guns or butter dilemma.

More interesting still, bombs and nuclear warheads may do as much damage to the environment as they do to the enemy, with possibly disastrous results. This aspect of play represents a real departure from the norm, as it makes *Global Effect* the only game I know of that places war in some kind of environmental context. In light of the immense ecological fallout from the Persian Gulf war, *Global Effect* registers a timely and telling point here.

If the rest of the game exhibited the same sort of real-life resonance, I would have no trouble recommending *Global Effect* wholeheartedly. But it doesn't. Despite promising "real-world situations and issues," too much of the game seems far removed from reality. Instead of being instructive and enlightening in any meaningful fashion, *Global Effect* comes across as abstracted, arbitrary, and more than a little ill-conceived.

The problems begin with the premise. The designers have

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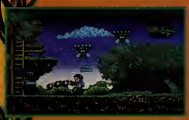

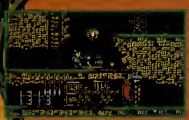

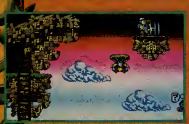

Screen shots shown are from the Amiga version of the game.

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Electronic Arts
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San Mateo, CA
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The name of the game

ocean

framed the game within a pseudo-sci-fi setting so sketchily explained that it's all but incoherent. According to the manual, the game takes place at some unspecified point in the future, when governments have become so centralized and sophisticated that individual leaders are able to wield dictatorial control over entire planets. You represent one of those leaders, entrusted with the care and feeding of a particular planet. And these two tidbits are all *Global Effect* has to say on the subject.

The scale of the game is also disconcerting. Although you are building multi-block cities, these are being erected on a global-sized map. What you wind up with, then, is the curious spectacle of gargantuan megalopolises that sprawl across continents.

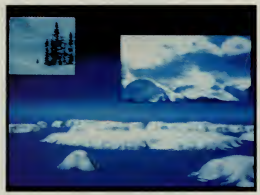
Although relatively minor, both of these complaints highlight some of the muddled thinking that went into *Global Effect*. However, the real blow to the game's credibility occurs in the first scenario, Create A World. If you pick a world in which the environment is relatively balanced, you'll discover that global temperatures will start to decline around the thirtieth year into the game, regardless of any steps you've taken to that point. Moreover, unless you reverse the trend, the game will end in another decade or so with the planet in the grips of an ice age.

You have two options to prevent this. With a custom-designed world, you can set the temperature to high and the number of trees low at the start of the scenario. Otherwise, the only way to halt the downward slide of the thermometer is to burn fossil fuels at a furious pace. Doing this, however, causes carbon-dioxide levels to rise precipitously, which in turn causes the temperature to climb. (A call to **Electronic Arts**, the game's U.S. distributor, confirmed that this solution is indeed the best way to forestall global freezing.) In other words, in order to save the planet, you have to pollute it — now *that* makes sense.

Global Effect rates better when judged strictly on its value as a game, but it still has its flaws. In particular, while games frequently walk a fine line between being challenging and frustrating, *Global Effect* strays across that all too often.

A prime example: even actions as innocuous as consulting the environmental data charts or scrolling around the map require the expenditure of some power. Therefore, if you need to conserve power, your only option is — you guessed it — to do nothing at all, until enough time has passed for your power meter to rise again. These idle interludes seem all the more annoying because the program regularly teases you with the message that new environmental data is available.

As to its visual appeal, the best thing that can be said about the game's plain-Jane graphics is that they are big



Forget global warming — it's global freezing you've got to watch out for here, and one way to avoid it is by burning fossil fuels as quickly as possible.

In "Create a World," there are eight different worlds from which to choose.

and uncluttered. But overall, this is just another disappointing part of the package. With its two-dimensional displays and almost non-existent animation, *Global Effect* presents you with a series of images that lie flat and lifeless on the screen.

In the end, *Global Effect* inspires ambivalence more than anything else. Despite what sounds like a winning mix of ingredients, the game proves to be much less than you'd expect from the sum of its parts. It offers neither fact nor very inspired fiction. *Global Effect* is, however, a game of sufficient depth that will take you many

Environmental data displays are useful, but checking them costs precious power.

hours to begin to exhaust all of its various options and permutations. But whether or not it sustains your interest over the same stretch of time is another question.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA graphics; supports Ad Lib, Roland, and Sound Blaster sound cards; mouse required.

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System requirements: 286 or faster machine with 640K RAM; hard disk with min. 8 megabytes of available space required, mouse recommended. Graphics compatible with EGA, MCGA and VGA (VGA highly recommended).

Sound support: Sound Blaster Pro, Adlib Gold

R RATED R (This program is voluntarily rated due to the partially violent and adult nature of the graphic imagery.) This program is intended for mature audiences only!! No sales to minor under 18 and where prohibited by law.

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THE HEROES OF THE 357TH

LEE BUCHANAN

Ready to strap into a hot-shot WWII fighter and do battle for the skies over Europe? Say you're stuck with a slow computer that won't run the latest state-of-the-art air combat simulations? Don't worry — help has arrived in the form of *The Heroes of the 357th*, designed by **Midnight Software** and distributed in the U.S. by **Electronic Arts**. It's your ticket to some fast and furious air combat.

Heroes puts you in the cockpit of a P-51D Mustang, the mount for the elite 357th Fighter Group. Sign on for a tour of duty and you'll fly a series of missions over Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe, conducting fighter sweeps, escorting bombers, or strafing and bombing ground targets. Those features may sound like old hat to flight-sim fanatics, but Heroes also delivers what counts most: action.

That's one bridge the Germans won't be able to use for a while!

While some recent releases - including *Aces of the Pacific*, *Falcon 3.0* and *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* - offer more sophisticated game play and many more options than *Heroes*, they also demand a lot more machine. Try to run those sims with less than a 386 and you may think you're driving a tank.

The thrill of sheer speed is what Heroes offers that those fancier sims can't. Your P-51 screams past ground targets, giving a breathtaking sensation of extremely fast motion — so fast, in fact, that I slowed down my 386/25 just to stay on top of the action. Unlike many current flight sims, *Heroes* should run just fine on a 286, allowing users of older computers a chance to fly the unfriendly skies of World War II Europe.

You can only look forward from the cockpit. Notice the detail of the 'Stang zooming in front of you.

The player begins the game assigned to the 357th Fighter Group based in Yoxford, England. You can hone your flying and fighting skills in six practice missions: fighter sweep, bomber escort, strafing run, special weapons, V1 intercept, and free flight.

Had an unpleasant experience in Paris and want some revenge? Choose "free flight" to bomb and strafe military and civilian targets (betcha never knew the Eiffel Tower was such an irresistible target!) without having to worry about enemy flak or fighters. It's great practice, one of the best ways to try out all your weapons and ordnance systems.

Of course, most players will want to jump right into the Tour of Duty and fight alongside the "Yoxford Boys" in a series of 34 missions, many of which are re-creations of actual missions flown by the 357th.

You'll be taken to the briefing room, where your stern-looking commanding officer assigns targets and briefs you on the mission. You'll also view a film showing ground targets and the enemy aircraft you can expect to face. Pay attention — this info helps you decide what combination of fuel tanks, cannon, rockets and bombs to carry.

When you've finished outfitting your Mustang, head to the runway for an animated sequence showing the flight taking off and then forming up over the airstrip. The flight from England to the target area is automatic, shown from a large-scale map of Europe.

Running on a 386-based machine, the P-51 is extremely responsive. If you're used to flying some other recent sims, you may find yourself whipping into barrel-rolls instead of banking into a turn. But once you get used to the sensitivity of the joystick control, this P-51 is a joy to fly. The frame rate is as smooth as any you'll see.

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at which *Heroes* runs, locating and approaching enemy fighters can be a challenge, a problem worsened by a rather clumsy viewing system from inside the cockpit. The player can't view out the left and right sides of the aircraft or check his six by looking behind the plane. Instead, you have to rely on your wingmen to alert you to the presence of the enemy:

The Eiffel Tower is just too big a target to pass up!

"Bogeys at three o'clock low!"

Once the enemy has been spotted, you can choose the combat view, which shows the nearest enemy plane in relation to your P-51. You also can cycle through enemy planes. The reverse combat view shows you the enemy in the foreground and your plane in the background. This takes some getting used to, particularly for players accustomed to scanning the skies in search of bogeys. But with a little practice, the combat view can be an effective tool for setting up for a dogfight.

Other perspectives allow the pilot to see ground targets in relation to his plane, an overhead view of the formation, and views of and from his wingmen. But be warned: you're still flying, even when switching perspectives. Don't fly into the ground while you're checking out the smoking remains of your target.

A useful addition to the viewing options is the ability to remove the cockpit display from the forward view. This gives the player a real sense of flying in a vast expanse of sky and is highly recommended when dogfighting. Another nice touch is a map that the player can call up on the lower part of the screen while you're in the cockpit. The map shows the plane in relation to any ground targets in the area.

Overall, the graphics in *Heroes* are adequate, if not spectacular. Little or no ground detail is visible until you're flying pretty low. Once you're close to them, buildings, rivers, barges, trains and explosions are sharp and detailed. Ground attacks are especially well done, with your cannon fire visibly chewing up the ground as you walk the fire to the target.

Close-up views of aircraft also are rendered in fine detail, so much so that you might want to admire the opponent you have locked in your sights for just a moment before you fire a burst and flame him.

Unfortunately, that's all it takes to shoot down a plane — a single burst. I didn't encounter a single plane that couldn't be downed with one press of the trigger, even by a single lucky shot fired in a head-on pass.

Fortunately, the player's plane isn't so vulnerable. It's hard to tell how much damage your plane is sustaining, but the wingmen will warn you to head for home. They'll also come to your aid, as well as ask for help when they're in trouble.

The bitmapped explosions in Heroes *are colorful and gratifying.*

Check out the view from behind your P-51 as you head in for a strafing run.

After completing the mission, the trip home is automatic and ends with an animated landing scene. Your CO will assess the mission and keep you updated on other war news in Europe and Asia — a nice historical touch.

Admittedly, there are several drawbacks to *Heroes of the 357th*. The player is confined to a single plane and flies a limited range of missions. But then that's the very aspect of World War II that this game attempts to simulate — the exploits of a single fighter group.

Players who have a faster machine and demand a wealth of detail in an air-combat sim may find *Heroes* too limited for their tastes. On the other hand, for those saddled with slower machines and who can't spend hours at the keyboard, *Heroes* delivers some furious air combat.

Coming out on the heels of some sophisticated and highly publicized flight sims in the past year, *Heroes* could get lost in the shuffle. That would be a shame, because this sim packs a powerful punch in a small package.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA or EGA graphics; hard drive; 286 or greater, supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, and compatible sound cards; joystick recommended.

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THE DAGGER OF AMON RA

LESLIE MIZELL

Romance blooms on Laura's first day in New York. But could Steve be the killer?

Laura Bow has had a bad day. No sooner does she step off the train in New York City, ready to tackle the world as a journalist, than her suitcase and money are stolen. Undaunted — and evidently unworried about accommodations or finances — she sets out for the offices of the *New York Daily Register News Tribune* (try fitting *that* on a masthead!).

Then her new editor assigns her to cover a page-one story: investigating the disappearance of an Egyptian dagger from the Leyendecker Museum. But the cub reporter has barely started her investigation when she discovers the first of what will eventually become a series of corpses. Locked in the museum with a killer and a mysterious cast of suspects, Laura must solve the mystery — or die in the attempt.

Sierra's follow-up to *The Colonel's Bequest* has much-improved graphics and a terrific soundtrack, but it makes the same mistakes as that first adventure — and a couple are even magnified. The production copy of *The Dagger of Amon Ra* also has some bugs in it that have Sierra already working on revisions.

Yikes! The bodies are starting to really pile up!

Talk to Ziggy in the speakeasy, but steer clear of the strange flapper in the powder room.

The problem with the Laura Bow games is that they throw out the very elements of mystery novels and movies that they try to depict. Laura Bow's job is to find the murderer, but she can't even interrogate the witnesses/suspects properly. No matter what your feelings are about Sierra's icon-based, point-and-click interface, the Laura Bow series really needs a text interface so you can question suspects freely and quickly.

In *Amon Ra*, here's how you ask a question: first, corner your suspect and flip through the interface icons until you reach the "?," then click on the suspect and wait while Laura's notebook appears. Flip through the notebook sections and pages until you find the person or thing about which you want to ask. Click on it and wait until your suspect makes an answer. Finally, make sure you read carefully and write down any information because you're *never* able to access that information again.

Once you've repeated this process the required two dozen times for *each* suspect and person you encounter, you'll see how tedious the game can become. There's no way to ask about alibis, even though everyone knows the first question any detective asks is "Where were you when...?". And it would be incredibly helpful if evidence were automatically recorded in your notebook — "turkey grease on elbow" as you examine a body, or "scared of Ziggy" as you question a suspect. But you must keep your own notes in *Amon Ra*; the sham notebook is nothing more than a list of question topics.

Like *The Colonel's Bequest*, *Amon Ra* is divided into acts. You can't advance to the next act unless you've completed certain tasks — only you don't know what those tasks are until you've done them. Some-

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times it might be seeing someone in a room, sometimes it might entail finding a body. If you complete two acts fairly close together, on purpose or by accident, you could easily miss a vital conversation you're supposed to overhear in another part of the museum, or not find a clue or item you need later. This most likely results in some lengthy backtracking while you try to figure out what you're missing.

A good example of this comes late in the game, when you find a mysterious statue in the Masters Gallery. After examining the statue, you can go toward the offices or toward the other exhibit rooms. If you go to the exhibits, you find a boot in the Armor Room. If you go toward the offices, you find out about another death and will probably enter an office to examine the body. If you do, you end up automatically advancing to the next act, and you'll *never* find that boot, even though you're chased through the Armor Room later. And you can't complete the game without the boot. It's frustrating, and unfair to the player.

There are some things about *Amon Ra* that will keep you playing. With the exception of Laura's boyfriend — who's a wimp despite his muscles and Clark-Kent hairdo — the Leyendecker has some whacked-out suspects that are fun to question and study.

Some inventive injuries and death scenes are sprinkled throughout the game.

Everyone's got a secret, from resident Nazi-in-training Wolf Heimlich to Yvette Delacroix, the museum "groupie."

And there are dozens of great, inventive ways to meet one's demise, both for Laura Bow and for the unfortunate Leyendecker employees. You can be scorched, sacrificed, slashed, skewered, shocked, seared, scrambled, submerged, strangled, stabbed, or scarfed down as an evening meal.

Meeroowww! *Catfight! Yvette's got her eye on every man in the museum — including Steve.*

When you're trapped with a bunch of mummies and a hooded killer, you can only hope you recently saved your game.

Three different endings reflect your success in *Amon Ra*. There's the "fired in disgrace" version for players who didn't search bodies or question suspects; the "half full, half empty" version for folks who did okay, but were a little shaky on motives for the different killings; and the "key to the city" version with the killer in jail and Laura the toast of the town.

A hint for the best finale: at the end of the game, you're asked to identify the killer, his or her motive for each slaying, and provide information on the various subplots. You must have four vital pieces of evidence, but they're not difficult to obtain. The problem is deciding motive from a dozen choices. Don't overuse "jealousy," even though you know the killer is obsessive. A better choice is "financial gain" or "to cover another crime." Jealousy is the motive only in the single crime of passion.

When all is said and done, the murderer is *way* too easy to spot, and the game, like the Leyendecker secret passages that lead nowhere, more frustrating than fun. Be aware that playing *Amon Ra* is a pains-taking process, and your enjoyment of it depends on how meticulous and detail-oriented you are. The Laura Bow series may still have promise, but it's already got two strikes against it.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA or EGA graphics (VGA only for Tandy); hard disk recommended; supports all major sound boards; mouse strongly recommended.

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SHADOW PRESIDENT

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

A friendly tutorial makes learning the interface a breeze.

"It is June 1, 1990. The Berlin Wall is falling. The Middle East is about to Explode. No one has heard of "Desert Storm." No one would believe a Soviet Coup. Welcome to your first day on the job."

Thus begins *Shadow President*, the first PC offering from a new company named **D.C. True, Ltd.** (as in "Dreams Come..."). The timing of this release, at the start of the most volatile and surprising presidential election in many years, couldn't be better. After all, who among us hasn't thought, at some time or another, that we could do a better job than *whoever* is in the Oval Office?

The main screen in Shadow President *is attractively designed, offering easy access to every function you need to perform as chief executive.*

This simulation gives you a chance to try, but it does even more: it teaches you much about the dynamics of geopolitics while also providing a richly entertaining gaming experience.

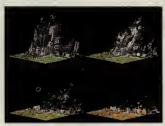
The President's first day begins with urgent updates from the online World News, including one ominous bulletin about a huge buildup of forces on the Iraq-Kuwait border. You call a meeting of the Cabinet and receive reports from each member, from the White House Chief of Staff to the Press Spokesperson.

Call upon the Shadow Network for your raw intelligence data and for insights into trends, developing crises, and possible eventualities. Accessing this database can sometimes give you a creepy sensation of having actually hacked your way into a secure government network, so plausible and fine-grained is the flow of information.

Text screens offer background data on different countries and their situations, all courtesy of the June 1990 edition of the entire 600-page *CIA World Factbook*, a very real reference source which would cost you about $150 if you sent off to Washington for a copy. The detail of this information, and its accuracy (at least, as of the time the game begins), is impressive, to say the least. Want to know the phone number for the Uruguayan Embassy? It's here.

Map screens are as well designed as data screens, enabling you to zoom in instantly on a country or a region, and presenting you with a beautifully designed graphic icon that shows you at a glance how prosperous and powerful that nation happens to be.

Shadow President doesn't wimp out and consistently reward cautious, gradual, let's-please-everybody policies—although that is certainly a valid way to play the simulation. In this game, decisive, even unpopular, actions are often called for as the best long-term response to a challenge. You can also play "Mad Dog" if you wish, until the consequences of your acts catch up to you, by doing irrational things like dumping $100 billion in military aid on Iceland or firing off a few nukes in the general direction of Libya. Oh, you won't get reelected, and in some extreme scenarios you may even be assassinated, but you'll tear up the pea patch while it lasts.



This stunning graphic sequence appears when you decide it's time to "press the button."

How do you "win" this simulation? That depends on your agenda. Is your primary purpose simply to win reelection, or do you burn with messianic zeal to feed the world's hungry and improve the quality of life for all? Perhaps your highest goal is to increase the strength of the U.S. economy—in which case, your decisions would obviously be very different from the ones you would take if you were obsessed mainly with rolling back Communism and furthering American political philosophy abroad.

In terms of game design, *Shadow President* is a very classy product. Despite the vast tides of data flowing like magma beneath the surface of the game, the interface is wonderfully clean and logical. The graphics are colorful and often quite dramatic (there's an absolute *knockout* sequence when you decide to "go nuclear!").

Obviously, *Shadow President* won't appeal to those craving lots of animated battlefield pyrotechnics, but the intellectual action is first-rate. We were deeply impressed by the depth and richness of this game; it has a texture that's almost palpable, coupled with a handsome and extremely friendly design.

Quite an auspicious debut for D.C. True!

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA and EGA graphics; supports expanded or extended memory if available; hard disk required; supports all major sound cards; mouse required.

RAMPART

JEFF LUNDRIGAN

At a time when games are becoming increasingly sophisticated and realistic, *Rampart* is almost a throwback. With its simple concept, graphics, and game control, the game looks and plays like something you might have seen about ten years ago.

But looks can be deceiving. *Rampart* is a 90's original, and the key to its success has

Propaganda balloons give you control over one of the enemy's guns.

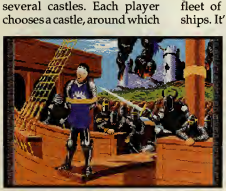
less to do with the sophistication of its graphics than with its intuitive appeal. The game pits you against one or two opponents in a contest of strategy and skill that's as simple as it is addictive: destroy him before he destroys you.

There are a few quirks in the PC translation from **Electronic Arts** not found in the arcade and videogame versions, but game play is essentially the same. You and your opponent (or opponents—up to three human players are permitted) are given nearly identical areas of land with several castles. Each player chooses a castle, around which a protective outer wall is placed, then places a battery of cannons within the wall. Next comes the fun part—during the next 15 seconds the players use those cannons to blow holes in each other's fortifications.

But there's a price for that fun, and that's where the *real* challenge of *Rampart* lies. You're each given variously shaped wall segments which you use to repair, as best you can, gaps caused by enemy shelling. (You can also use them to expand your kingdom to include more territory and castles.) The blocks resemble those like you'd find in *Tetris*, and you often have to work with blocks that simply can't be used to repair damage. And if you can't fill all the gaps before time expires, you either lose or start over with a single castle and minimal artillery.

If you manage to patch together a complete wall, you're given more cannons to place, depending on how much area (and/or additional castles) you're able to enclose. Then you both start shooting again. It's great stuff, the sort of design that offers both an amazingly short learning curve and plenty of replayability.

There's also a one-player game in which you battle a fleet of computer-controlled ships. It's extremely challenging (the computer's armada receives bountiful reinforcements after each battle segment), but it doesn't have nearly the appeal of squaring off against a human opponent.



Lose the battle and you'll be swimming with the sharks.

One of the twists in the PC version comes in the "enhanced" mode, in which you have the option of trading in some of your newly acquired cannons for other items. For the price of three cannons, you can purchase a "propaganda balloon," which flies over enemy guns (or ships) and drops leaflets which convince the crew of one of them to work for your side, giving you control of one of the enemy's guns for that round. Four cannons will buy you a Super Gun, which fires incendiary shells that leave burning holes in the ground. The craters can't be built on for three turns, making it extremely difficult to patch holes in fortifications.

The two-player game is far more satisfying than going against the computer-controlled fleet.

Finally, the enhanced mode scatters civilian huts around your territory. If you enclose a hut within your castle walls, it causes ground troops, or "grunts," to appear in your enemy's territory. These have a nasty habit of clustering around unprotected castles and destroying them, and they can't be built over either. They can be destroyed by cannon fire, but if your opponent is shooting at them, he isn't shooting at you.

Play control is a little sluggish, especially with joysticks. But you do have the option of using a mouse, and if you've got a decent one it's the ideal way to play the one-player game; in two-player mode, one competitor must use a joystick or the keyboard.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; EGA, MCGA, VGA graphics; hard disk required; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster and Roland MT-32 sound cards; supports joystick and mouse (recommended).

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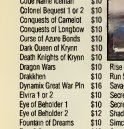

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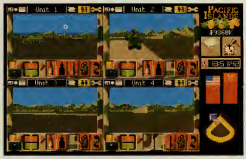
PACIFIC ISLANDS

JEFF SEIKEN

Zero in on the enemy tanks and watch them blow up in bitmapped explosions.

Based on the name alone, *Pacific Islands* from U.K.-based **Empire** Simulation (distributed by **ReadySoft**) could easily be mistaken for a scenario disk for *Microsoft Flight Simulator*. In reality, though, the game is the sequel to the tank combat simulator *Team Yankee*.

Team Yankee licensed its title and its WWIII-in-Europe premise from the best-selling novel of the same name by Harold Coyne. The inspiration for *Pacific Islands*, in contrast, seems to come from a Loony Toons cartoon. Consider its central conceit: Renegade Soviet communists backed by North Korea have seized the Pacific atoll of Yama-Yama. It's up to your tank team, fresh from the Persian Gulf (or the "Gulf of Persia" as the manual calls it) to oust the invaders and restore Yama-Yama to its rightful state of balmy bliss.



The clever interface allows you to control 16 vehicles simultaneously — a feat even Patton would have trouble duplicating.

But once you get past the loopy background material, the rest of the game turns out to be designed in a very sober and sensible fashion. The manual boasts of the six man-years of development that went into *Team Yankee* and *Pacific Islands*; too bad the designers didn't devote a few man hours to create a less absurd scenario for *Pacific Islands*.

Once you've resigned yourself to the ridiculous setting, you'll appreciate the game's most novel feature: a clever interface that allows you to control, more or less simultaneously, up to 16 vehicles organized into four separate platoons. The interface manages this by dividing the screen into four quadrants, one for each platoon. From this four-way display, you can issue commands to all of your units while viewing the battlefield from four different perspectives at once.

Admittedly, the split-screen view has its drawbacks. There's a hefty amount of information packed into some very small spaces, almost to the point of visual overload. But learning how to play *Pacific Islands* is a lot like learning how to juggle: what seems terrifically complicated at first — coordinating the movement of several independent objects — becomes intuitive with practice. You can also jump to a full-screen display for any platoon by clicking on a icon to get a clearer, less cluttered picture.

The campaign to liberate Yama-Yama runs the course of some 25 different battle scenarios. Each engagement carries its own set of challenges, requiring you to accomplish a variety of objectives in the face of any enemy whose strength and disposition are unknown at start. The excitement level generally runs high during the scenarios, largely due to the sketchy nature of the intelligence available to you. Ambushes are always a real possibility, as are sudden assaults, hidden minefields, and other nasty surprises.

It's undeniable that the scenarios are varied and interesting, but the framework for them is much less satisfactory. To begin with, the program only permits you to advance to the next scenario if you win the current one. Losing a battle means refighting it, over and over again, until you emerge victorious or surrender to the tedium.

When you do advance to a new scenario, the program automatically saves your status to disk, overwriting the previous saved game. That means that midway through a campaign, after a few costly victories, you may find yourself too weak to continue, and the game won't let you back up and resume the campaign from an earlier point: you must start again with the first scenario.

Pacific Islands can't equal the technical precision and realism of MicroProse's *M1 Tank Platoon*, but then again it never really tries to, setting its gunsights on a more modest target instead. *Pacific Islands* attempts to combine some of the detail of a simulation with the playability and high-velocity thrills of an arcade game. I wouldn't say the game scores a direct hit, but it comes close.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA, EGA, or CGA graphics; supports Ad Lib, Roland, and compatible sound cards; joystick optional; mouse recommended.

HILL STREET BLUES

JEFF LUNDRIGAN

Considering the fact that *Hill Street Blues* has been off the air for several years, the release of a PC game based on it is a little strange. The game puts you in charge of a police station, and the officers you control were all characters on the TV show. Other than that, however, the game has little to do with the series — the officers could be Keystone Cops and it wouldn't change the game at all. In fact, a Keystone Cops game might be preferable.

Actually, the resource-management aspect of the game is fairly appealing. You have nine officers under your charge, and when a crime report comes in, anything from purse-snatching to murder, you select an officer to investigate. Naturally, reports are coming in all the time, and you can expect to have several investigations going on at once. That requires you to cycle your officers so that they won't be out on the street when they need to be making court appearances.

The problem is that this **Digitek** game doesn't have much else going for it. It's doubtful you could design a clunker interface if you tried. Everything is controlled through a mouse-driven point-and-click interface, but the buttons and sub-menus are laid out in the worst possible order.

Although all sorts of crimes will be reported, they're all investigated in exactly the same way: the report comes in, you select an officer to investigate, have the officer drive to the scene, and call an ambulance for the victim. Controlling the officer, you start walking several blocks in all directions, looking for the suspect.

Suspects for which you have a description are easy to spot: they're surrounded by flashing red arrows. But there's no way to question the victim or bystanders about which direction a suspect may have gone. You just have wander around until you see him.

This problem is worst in murder cases, where a description of the suspect is never available and there are no red arrows. With no one to question, you're reduced to wandering the area, literally stopping every pedestrian until somebody breaks and runs.

And heaven help you if a suspect decides to flee. The direction arrows which control the officer's movement are on one sub-menu, and the icons to approach, arrest, shoot, or warn the suspect are on *another* sub-menu. What this means is that when you get close enough to approach the suspect, you have to switch menus — and often the suspect will cut and run when you're not on the movement menu. It's more than a little disturbing that the only apparent way to stop a suspect who flees is to gun him down, then arrest him when he can't run anymore.

The game comes to a grinding halt when one of your officers has to appear in court. Everything immediately stops during a trial, and there's no way to speed up the judicial process.

Even chasing a suspect is a chore, since your officers don't seem to like running or driving in the direction you choose. Instead they take odd, completely unnecessary turns over which you have no control, doing things like running to all four corners of an intersection rather than simply crossing the street. During one game, halfway to a crime scene, a squad car circled a particular block *five times* before continuing on.

Hill Street Blues is also played in real time, which means that playing for a solid two or three hours will get you to about nine or ten o'clock on the morning of the first day. By that time, you'll probably feel that you've already played for too long.

GP

The game is played from a top-down, bird's-eye perspective, but the game's relatively simple graphics make almost every block look the same.

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA/MCGA, EGA, or CGA graphics; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, and compatible sound cards; supports mouse.

OUT OF THIS WORLD

STEPHEN POOLE

Pan shots and multiple perspectives give Out of This World *a true cinematic look.*

Over the past couple of years, many PC game developers have taken the approach that bigger is better. Massive production budgets, bigger games, and fancier graphics are the standard approach nowadays, driven (at least to some degree) by the notion that the PC game industry is "the New Hollywood," and that PC games should incorporate cinematic techniques.

It's a wonderful concept, and there's nothing wrong with pushing the technological edge to give games better sound and graphics. All too often, though, those enhancements only make you feel that you're *watching* a movie, instead of being in one.

But the arrival of *Out of This World*, from Interplay, may cause game developers to re-evaluate the "bigger is better" approach. Despite its low-res, 16-color VGA graphics and intermittent music and sound effects, *Out of This World* comes closer to being "interactive cinema" than almost any other game I've seen to date.

You know you're in a real mess when this is the response you get after extending your hand in friendship.

This puzzle-adventure is based on a simple premise, which thankfully avoids trying to explain the sticky details. An experiment gone haywire has transported you to an unknown world. There are no clues as to your location — it might be another planet, it might be another dimension, or you may have travelled forward in time.

Swimming to the top of the body of water you've been plopped into is no problem, but a quick glance around the bizarre landscape is all it takes to realize you're in a heap of trouble. Before the first scene is over, you'll have to destroy poisonous "centipedes" (all it takes is a kick, but the buggers are everywhere) and escape a "mountain lion" with an appetite for scientists.

You'll probably think your luck has changed when several humanoids appear and blast the carnivorous critter that's been chasing you — until one of them turns the laser on you. When you awaken, you find yourself imprisoned in a cage suspended from the ceiling of a cave. After you and your cellmate find a way to escape the cage, you find a laser pistol — and that's when the game kicks into high gear.

No, the game doesn't pick up here because you can start blasting things, though you will find yourself in plenty of shootouts. As in last year's *D/Generation*, the real fun is in working your way through a huge maze. You'll use the laser pistol in a variety of ways — to create force fields to protect you from the guards' lasers, to blast your way through walls, and to zap mechanisms which open or close doors.

The smooth, convincing animation is integral to the suspension of your disbelief. The low-res polygon graphics don't compare to the high-end artwork players are growing accustomed to, but the fast, lifelike movement succeeds in creating a stunning sense of realism. It's on a par with the animation found in the highly acclaimed *Prince of Persia* (and, perhaps more appropriately, *4-D Boxing*, another game where authentic movement compensated for "unrealistic" graphics.)

It's the combination of a simple yet engrossing plot, fluid animation, and the tasteful use of moviemaking techniques that make *Out of This World* the perfect example of interactive cinema. At key points in the game, you're given a breather from the action with animated sequences featuring jump cuts, multiple camera angles, and perfectly synchronized background music and sound effects. Again, the *technique* is far more important than the *technology*; it's clear that **Delphine Software**, the game's designers, knew something about filmmaking, and incorporated just the right amount of that knowledge into an interactive format.

Out of This World isn't perfect. The copy-protectrritual requires you to supply the correct symbols from a codewheel *twice* each time you play, a demand we found a little unreasonable. And the password feature starts you off at the beginning of a level — which means you *will* find yourself repeatedly covering familiar ground. But the overall achievement of *Out of This World* makes those gripes seem like nitpicking. This is one players will be talking about for a long time.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM (Tandy graphics), 512K RAM for EGA/VGA graphics; 286 or better; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound cards, and the Disney Sound Source; joystick or gamepad recommended.

FACTS IN ACTION

LESLIE EISER

Feeling bored? Perhaps Tyler, an adorable skateboarder who's always ready with a clue, can interest you in a friendly game of *Facts in Action*. A variation on the popular memory game Concentration, *Facts in Action* combines glorious visual images with some pretty remarkable audio tracks — and does a nice job of simultaneously educating and entertaining younger players.

The game begins with a setup screen that provides a variety of interface controls. You can choose to play alone or against a friend, with three levels of difficulty to select from. The topic, too, is a variable: mix and match 125 tiles from the four categories supplied (World History, Basic Science, Spanish and Prehistoric Animals) or choose to focus on only one subject. Don't fret if you get bored with those choices; Spirit of Discovery plans to release *10,000* more tiles in the months to come.

At the core of *Facts in Action* is a multi-colored board of 25 tiles, and a very simple idea. To win, you must match an audio clue given by Tyler with the appropriate card. It sounds easy, but there are complications. In level 1, the cards are dealt face up, and all that's required to make a match is to pair a visual image (a face, a chemical symbol, a planet) with its description.

At level 2, you have 30 seconds to study the tiles before they're turned face-down and the game begins. Again, you must match tiles with the appropriate audio clues, but without the visual clues provided in level 1. Pick a wrong tile, and the tile flips back over; match correctly, and you're shown an animated sequence and the tile is removed from play. Eventually you'll make all the matches, revealing the hidden picture.

Level 3 adds one more complexity, a double-high game board — 25 tiles on top of 25 tiles, all turned face down. Removing the first level merely reveals the next.

What makes *Facts in Action* unique are the tile sets. Each tile in the Basic Science and World History categories represents an important factual or fictional idea and includes an animated video segment plus the audio track. Whenever you make a match, something exciting happens — a space ship blasts off from Mars, George Washington chops down a cherry tree, or two dinosaurs butt heads. Meanwhile, the excellent audio track offers a carefully chosen description of the tile. Naturally, there's support for all the major sound boards, but the quality of the audio tracks is so high they are crystal-clear even through the internal PC speaker.

At the intermediate level the tiles are turned face-down — remembering where each tile is located is half the battle.

Despite the attractive wrappings, *Facts in Action* does have a few minor problems. Compared to the often fabulous rewards for matching a tile, the animation at the end of a game is a letdown — once you've seen Tyler float by on his skateboard, you've seen it all. There's also no Hall of Fame or Top 10 list, rather discouraging to youngsters used to games where keeping records and getting better are part of the fun.

Facts in Action is an attractive and intriguing game with clearly defined educational content specifically designed to stimulate interest in a wide range of topics. True, *Facts in Action* may be something of a misnomer for a program that includes fossils that turn to look at you, a mummy that sticks out its tongue, and a Stegosaurus that reads a book. But that doesn't lessen the benefit the youngsters at your house will derive from this delightful and well-designed game.

GP

Gorgeous colors and a cute emcee make Facts in Action *appealing to youngsters six and up.*

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; hard drive; 386/SX or better strongly suggested; VGA graphics; supports AdLib or Sound Blaster cards; supports mouse.

POWERMONGER

MATTHEW A. FIRME

If you're anything like me, Bullfrog's first game, *Populous*, pointed out some surprising autocratic tendencies in your nature. Who could have predicted how enthusiastically we closet despots would embrace the idea of playing god?

Now Bullfrog has designed yet another title to delight the would-be dictator—*PowerMonger*, published and distributed by Electronic Arts. But while *Populous* is macro-dictatorial—focusing as it does on the godlike power to alter land, cause natural disasters, and so forth—*PowerMonger* is decidedly micro-dictatorial.

As you begin, it's just you against the world. Here, a small village looks like a suitable target for attack.

You are a charismatic mortal leader, issuing direct commands to your subjects either personally or through your captains. Every town in this game has a name, as does every person!

Your specific role is that of a once-powerful ruler whose lands have been destroyed through some seismic upheaval. With only a handful of your surviving followers, you set foot on the shores of a distant land. If you are to once again rule as a king, you'll have to wrest control from the native population.

The character you play is represented by an imposing general, towering over the 3-D terrain map. He is also present on the terrain map itself, as a red-cloaked figure around whom your remaining followers gather.

The degree to which your followers react to your orders is a very important part of the game, and decided by your posture—aggressive, normal, or passive. If your orders are to attack a village, the passive posture means that your army will not kill many villagers during the conquest. And since the people of any conquered village become your subjects, this leaves more able-bodied recruits. Had your posture been set on aggressive, your soldiers would fight until everyone in the target village was slaughtered.

With only a few commands and a proper use of posture, you can quickly conquer the first few lands in the game. First, attack a small village using the passive posture. When victory is yours, change to aggressive posture and Get Men and Get Food. Now repeat the process, until you command a snowballing military machine of 100 men, with enough food to keep them happy for a long while.

As the game continues, though, this tactic isn't enough. Other armies also seek to conquer this land, and often they're better-equipped than you. So you must pause to invent new weapons before proceeding to the next village. And you must be ready to scurry for safety should a huge, aggressive army come your way.

PowerMonger is at once simple and complex. Although the command options are self-explanatory, the results of those commands can have far-reaching consequences. If you aggressively order your followers to begin inventing catapults, for instance, you'll obviously gain some catapults. But as your followers hack down the forests to construct your machine, they strip the land of its natural resources. As a result, your actions even affect the weather, as rain and snowfall patterns change over your now-barren land.

It can take some time getting used to the many-layered strategies a game like *Power-*

When you conquer large towns, you'll often get a new captain. These captains can move armies and supplies all around your new kingdom, facilitating your goals of continental domination.

Monger presents. But the documentation is quite good, and even includes a strategy guide to help you on your way. And because the people and towns are very nicely rendered, spending time with the game is a real pleasure.

A few words of warning are in order, though. First use a Sound Blaster or compatible sound card while playing, if at all possible. A lot of helpful information can be gleaned from the game's sound effects. And be ready for some slow going if you play on a 286. On a 286 with a Sound Blaster and 1 meg of RAM, the game fairly crawled. The pace was much more energetic on a 386.

In *PowerMonger*, Bullfrog has succeeded in matching the addictive nature of *Populous*, while creating a new world and all-new challenges. In the game manual's introduction, the designers state that they have some idea of what their perfect game might be. "*Populous* was the first step to writing this game, and *PowerMonger* is further along that road. But our ideal game is yet to be written." If *PowerMonger* is only the second step in Bullfrog's journey, I'll gladly follow as far as this path leads.

GP

Hardware requirements: 560K RAM; VGA or EGA graphics; supports Sound Blaster and compatible sound cards (strongly recommended); mouse recommended.

SPELLCRAFT: ASPECTS OF VALOR

T. LIAM MACDONALD

There is something oddly schizoid about *Spellcraft: Aspects of Valor*. On one hand, you have game screens that are equal to anything put out by SSI or any of the other major role-playing game publishers; yet on the other, many of the scenes you visit repeatedly appear flat and artless, sometimes even inept.

The premise of *SpellCraft*, from AsciiWare, is revealed in a series of rather static text and graphic screens. As the game opens, you discover you're a character named Robert, called to England by your long-lost uncle Gar. Arriving at Stonehenge, you find yourself zapped into another dimension known as Valoria. Here your uncle is a wizard named Garwayen, ruling magister of the Wizard Council.

The Death Realm is filled with graveyards full of cairns and mausoleums. You're sent here when you die in another realm, but if meet an untimely end here the game is over.

Garwayen is growing old and needs a successor. He's also worried about a fiendish plot being hatched by the other wizards to conquer Terra — the world from which you came. These wizards are the Lord Wizards of the Colleges of Magic (Earth, Fire, Air, Water, Mind, and Ether). A rift is growing between the Terra and Valoria, and Garwayen wants to close the rift to keep the two worlds from coming into contact. But the Lord Wizards want to enlarge the rift in order to exercise their powers on Terra. Your mission: stop the widening of the rift.

The creation and casting of spells is handled wonderfully in *Spellcraft*, reflecting a great deal of care on the part of the designers. In essence, you build spells from the ground up, much like making a recipe. A spell is defined by its Aspect, while the addition of Control Ingredients -- Jewels, Stones, Powders, and Candles -- fine-tunes the spell even further. Add the five elements in the proper amounts, utter the magic word, and you have a new spell.

But spells are not gained easily, and magic words take some time to find. Only after extended trials are you given the clues necessary to expand your spellbook. Once you have a base spell — the exact ingredients in the exact proportions — you can begin to modify it. Each element has different properties. Candles control attack, damage, and special duration; Jewels control speed, radius and intelligence; Powders control spell duration; and Stones control defense, durability, and the time it takes for a spell to appear. Each spell has levels of elasticity that determine just how far you can stretch the ingredients before the spell backfires and you die.

This entire system is original, appealing, and attractively done. It offers the player a chance to be highly creative — a quality strangely absent in many RPGs — and will be a thrill for those who value spells above all else in role-playing.

The places where these spells are used — the domains — and where all combat occurs, are nicely rendered, each having a distinct look and sound: aqua tones and supermarket jazz for the Water Realm; billowing clouds and moody synth for the Air; burning trees, fiery pits, and dark, driving music for Fire, and so on.

But the problem is that once you've seen the screens and traversed the five major realms, that's about it. Only the two "secret" realms (Ether and Mind) remain to be discovered. The realms are just too small, and the variation between levels isn't great enough to offset that shortcoming. You'll spend most of your time travelling between locations in Terra (which features some of the weaker graphics in the game), gaining money by selling things, accumulating items and wisdom, making more spells, and going after increasingly difficult wizards. Rest assured that you'll be annihilated many times before you get the measure of your enemy enough to defeat him.

Enroll in an Elemental College to learn a particular set of spells.

So we have a mixed bag: fine graphics in the realms, but they're too small; excellent spellcasting engine; mediocre interconnecting scenes; intriguing and challenging -- though eventually all-too-similar -- enemies; and good sound. If you want a spellcrafting game that you can sink your teeth into, and can tolerate spotty quality, then *SpellCraft: Aspects of Valor* fits the bill.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA graphics; hard drive; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, and compatible sound cards; mouse recommended.

MICROLEAGUE BASEBALL 4

JEFF SEIKEN

Baseball fans have come to count on two things each spring: the eruption of another controversy involving George Steinbrenner, and the release of a new version of *MicroLeague Baseball*. This year didn't disappoint on either account, although *MicroLeague Baseball 4* (*MLB4*) materialized a bit later than promised. But no matter. Judging from Steinbrenner's successful bid to re-enter baseball and the sticker on MLB4's box cover promising discounts on future upgrades, it appears that both traditions are secure.

Veteran MicroLeaguers will be happy to hear that *MLB4* is a substantial improvement over the previous version. The program corrects its predecessor's most flagrant flaws, such as pitchers' tendencies to surrender too many walks. The managerial menus have been streamlined, providing a more sensible (though still quite extensive) range of coaching options. And its statistical database remains as comprehensive as ever: in fact, *MLB4* has few peers among other stat-based simulations on the market when it comes to statistical detail and number-crunching capabilities.

Set up dream matchups between 28 of the greatest teams of all time, or download stats from the USA Today Sports Center and replay last night's game.

Besides fine-tuning the program's engine, however, **MicroLeague Sports** has added a host of extras, including a programmable computer coach and a schedule editor. The latter feature is a true marvel, and makes running a season replay a snap. The editor can generate a complete day-by-day schedule for a league in minutes; all that's left to do is specify which games you wish to play yourself, leaving the computer to handle the rest in "quick-play" mode.

The graphics have also been revamped. The most dramatic difference is that *MLB4* now boasts live-action zooms — windows that pop up showing digitized video footage of real players. But as wonderful as this feature sounds, its appeal quickly wears thin. The problem is that the program utilizes a limited repertoire of film clips, repeating them endlessly even when the footage doesn't fit the situation. One of the most common zooms, for instance, is of the first baseman taking a throw from the second baseman. But this clips appears even when the throw originates from the shortstop or third baseman. And nine times out of ten the video inserts accompany the most routine of plays: do we really need to see the same live-action close-up of an outfielder catching a fly ball?

There are also problems with the animation, the most annoying being the way base runners react when a batter hits a fly ball with two outs in the inning. If the ball is destined to drop in for a hit, the runners take off with the crack of the bat. But if the fly is going to be caught, the runners stay put — telegraphing the outcome of the play before the ball has cleared the infield.

My biggest complaint about the game, however, concerns its treatment of player fatigue. In *MLB4*, players tire and their performance declines unless they're rested occasionally. The intent is to force you to use your players in a realistic manner, but the game's designers tend to view the typical big-leaguer as an oddly fragile creature, unable to play in more than a game or two at a time without becoming bushed. Part-time players who haven't logged many at bats during the season in real life have even less stamina — sometimes all it takes to leave them fatigued for the next game is a single turn at the plate as a pinch-hitter.

The Offensive Sign Book reduces complicated signals to a single keystroke.

Finally, a word of warning. On a 286 computer, *MLB4* plays *very* slowly. In general, a low-scoring game (meaning minimal managerial input) will take an hour or more, with a large chunk of this time spent waiting on the program to access your hard drive for every batter. In order to enjoy the game, you need either at least a 386, or a huge supply of patience.

MLB4 attempts to cover the ground that its predecessor missed, and while it succeeds for the most part, its shortcomings keep the game from fulfilling its all-star potential. But remember that this is *MicroLeague Baseball* we're talking about — there's always next year.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA/EGA graphics; supports Sound Blaster and Ad Lib sound cards; supports mouse.

ROAD & TRACK PRESENTS GRAND PRIX UNLIMITED

JEFF LUNDRIGAN

If you're a fan of Grand Prix racing, this new simulation from **Accolade** will seem like the gift of a lifetime. But if you only have a passing interest in the sport, you probably won't find too much to excite you.

That's not to knock the design of *Road & Track Presents Grand Prix Unlimited*. Nearly everything about the game is user-selectable, from the weather to the car you drive. Unfortunately, some of these choices don't seem to be too crucial. For example, you're given a choice of six Formula One cars to drive, but once you hit the track, you can switch to the Car Adjustment screen and modify the car's characteristics. In effect, this means that the only difference between a Ferrari and a McLaren-Honda is how your car looks — each car has the same set of characteristics, and they can be adjusted over the same range of values.

In addition, many of the adjustments you'll make are determined by the particular track you're going to be driving on. If there are a lot of sharp curves and you have to drive in wet weather, for example, it would be suicidal to fit your car with wide steering and slick tires. It's nice to be able to "work" on your car, but after a little experience — or even after just reading the manual closely — the decisions are always very straightforward.

On the plus side, you get plenty of chances to become familiar with each track on the circuit. Before each race, you can "fly" the track — a one-lap tour during which the computer controls the steering, and you can change the view as much as needed to get an idea of what the track is like. You can also compete in practice races as many times as you need without affecting your standings on the circuit.

The actual races are a mild disappointment, and that's why the game will mostly appeal to diehard fans of Formula One racing. To be perfectly fair, however, that disappointment isn't the fault of the programmers at Accolade. Driving a car at 200 mph, with the road screaming by under you and the wind in your face, is undoubtedly an exhilarating experience. But squeeze that experience down to a 12-inch computer screen and it loses a lot of impact. The same charge could be leveled against flight simulators, of course, but flying a jet fighter isn't something you get to do for real that often. Even on the higher difficulty settings of *Grand Prix Unlimited*, you eventually become skilled enough to outdistance the other cars, and then it's all just a matter of turning at the right time — kind of dull when you consider that most of us drive cars every day.

But genuine Grand Prix fans will love the game's other features. It's no accident that *Grand Prix Unlimited* is endorsed by *Road & Track* magazine. It's built around real Grand Prix tracks and circuits, and gives you actual Grand Prix drivers to race against. The manual even sketches the history of the Grand Prix, although a lot of the information given is in the form of outright trivia, stuck in boxes near the bottom of a page.

Probably the game's most exciting feature is the Architect mode. It gives you the chance to modify existing tracks or create new ones from scratch, and even those only mildly interested in racing will get a kick out of putting together their own tracks. The amount of detail the game supports is noteworthy: once the track has been designed, you can "decorate" it with objects, ranging from road signs to buildings to people. These objects include cameramen, which actually function, recording a point of view which you can watch during Instant Replay.

The view from the driver's seat is clean and functional.

All in all, *Grand Prix Unlimited* doesn't exactly live up to its title. Racing fans are likely to find it a nice computerized extension of their favorite pastime, but for the nonfan, there's simply not enough action to make it all worthwhile.

GP

The Track Editor offers the most fun in Grand Prix Unlimited. *Design a track to challenge the best drivers in the world, then hop in your Ferrari and test out your creation.*

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA or MCGA graphics; hard drive; 16-Mhz or faster processor; supports AdLib, Roland, and Sound Blaster sound cards; supports mouse and joystick (recommended)

DUNGEONMASTER

BERNARD YEE

The object-oriented inventory management system is nearly identical to the one found in SSI's Eye of the Beholder.

Its name may stand for "faster than light," but that certainly doesn't describe the speed at which **FTL** brought its classic first-person perspective, dungeon-crawl game for the Amiga to the world of PCs. When *Dungeonmaster* appeared on the Amiga a few years back, it sparked such a sensation among RPG fans that PC owners eagerly awaited the news that FTL was porting the game over for their dungeon-hungry computers.

Dungeonmaster never showed up, and in the meantime games like *Eye of the Beholder* (*EOTB*) and *Bane of the Cosmic Forge* filled the void. Now, after games like *Ultima Underworld* and *Clouds of Xeen* fill your screen with first-person perspective spelunking, *Dungeonmaster* brings its belated greetings. *Dungeonmaster* was a game far ahead of its time, and it's still fun today; you just have to understand the game's history and adjust your expectations a bit.

Dungeonmaster is not a graphics tour-de-force by any stretch, looking more like EGA than the 256-color extravaganzas we've become accustomed to. The game comes with a parallel port sound device that gives you decent sound without a sound card, but unfortunately the FTL Sound Adapter prevents use of your printer. As for the interface, well...if Apple wins its lawsuit against Microsoft, then FTL could sue SSI for copying *Dungeonmaster*'s "look and feel" — *EOTB* veterans will feel extremely comfortable in the world of *Dungeonmaster*.

The plot is standard: find the important artifacts and defeat the bad guy. Interestingly, you begin as an incorporeal "guiding spirit," the apprentice of an archmage who has been banished by one of his own experiments gone awry. In his place is Lord Chaos, his evil half. On the first level you find 24 different champions, trapped by Lord Chaos, to use as your heroes once they're freed. No monsters on this level, just food — a nice change allowing you to get used to the game and magic system.

But after that *Dungeonmaster* turns into a pretty combat-intensive game — no NPCs to talk to here. Fourteen different levels await your exploration, but automapping is a comfort you'll have to do without. The puzzles are those of object manipulation — find the right thing, press the right button, or put an object on the pressure plate.

As in *EOTB*, you move your party through the dungeon from a first-person perspective. Those familiar keys, pressure plates, hidden buttons, levers, and teleportation fields are obstacles to any *EOTB* veteran. The interface is a simple point-and-click, drag-and-drop system that allows you to pick up objects on the ground and move them into your various characters' inventory slots.

Supplies of food and water are constant concerns, and the game — like combat — occurs in real time. Each character has a weapon in hand which they can click on to use in combat, with different attack modes; you can throw daggers, rocks, and other projectiles, again as in *EOTB*. Unfortunately, the "*Beholder* two-step" — a "strategy" used to defeat enemies in *EOTB* — is equally useful here. Attack, sidestep, attack, sidestep and the enemy will never get a clear shot with its magic.

The magic system is more noteworthy. It's similar to the Ultima system, where your mana (magic points) fuels a recitation of various magic syllables which combines them into a spell. Though you have access to all syllables at the start of the game, you don't know the proper combinations — but you'll soon discover scrolls with spell formulas.

Without any slavish adherence to any particular game system (i.e., AD&D or Ultima), FTL has done some cherry-picking of its own and assembled a bestiary, a flexible combat and magic system (try closing a door on a monster for a laugh), and an interface that's still noteworthy years after it debut. And just think — in an alternate universe in which FTL released this product on the heels of the Amiga version, we'd all be clamoring for *Dungeonmaster IX*.

GP

An unwary party can meet an early demise in Dungeonmaster, *where foes can attack from any direction. The graphics are definitely a step behind the times.*

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA or EGA graphics; hard drive; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, and the FTL Sound Adapter; mouse recommended.

PROPHECY OF THE SHADOW

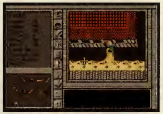
NEIL RANDALL

It was beginning to look as though SSI had tied all its future fantasy role-playing efforts to its Advanced Dungeons & Dragons line. But judging from *Prophecy of the Shadow*, it's clear that SSI is willing to look outside AD&D for an introductory level role-playing game. The choice they've made is a good one, but the execution still needs some work.

Prophecy of the Shadow is a single-player role-playing game; rather than maneuvering a party of adventurers, you work with only one. A number of games have used this idea in the past, but *Prophecy*'s most obvious influence is the fine *Faery Tale Adventure* from a few years ago (I'm still waiting for its sequel). In fact, it's safe to say that if you liked *Faery Tale Adventure*, you'll like *Prophecy of the Shadow*, and if you didn't you won't.

You view your character from an overhead perspective, similar to the one used in the Ultima series. Using the mouse or the cursor keys, you move him (or her) around the map, which shows roads, trails, buildings, woods, desert, swamp, and so on. To fight, you simply use your weapon (via the Use menu or by clicking on the weapon's icon in your inventory), hit the Attack

The innkeeper has information about several events and places. He can also provide food and lodging, and the occasional rumor.



Our hero prepares to enter a building. The lower left of the display shows his inventory. The icons along the side allow all game actions.

icon or A on the keyboard, then target the attack with the mouse or keyboard and click (or press Enter). Nicely, all you have to do is target once. As long as you want to continue attacking with the same weapon, the computer will keep doing so for you. Given the semi-arcade nature of the combat system, this is a very helpful feature.

You start the adventure in a village on an island. Your master, the mage Larkin, has just been killed, and you soon discover that you're the chief suspect. Your first task is to move around the island and look for proof of your innocence, then take that proof to the resident of a building in the town's southwest corner. After that, the real adventure kicks in. You must teleport (called "translocate" here) to the mainland and go from place to place, taking on a quest that reveals itself as you go.

The magic system is superb. You need a "catalyst" to cast spells, and you must find scrolls containing the spells in order to learn them. There are few spells, but they work, and they contain almost as much real variety as the huge spell lists of other RPGs. Character interaction is also handled well, and when you meet someone, you're presented with a digitized graphic of the person (although constant repetition dulls this treat).

The most enjoyable feature of *Prophecy of the Shadow* is that it focuses on the two most fascinating elements of role playing: exploration and story. Instead of hacking enemies to bits, you spend most of your time travelling and searching in an attempt to figure out exactly what you're supposed to be doing. As you discover new places and meet new people, more of the overall story is revealed to you. Unfortunately, at too many times you'll find yourself stumped, with no real idea of what to do next. Especially in the mid-game, the clues aren't set out very well, and wonderment can turn to frustration as you can roam the same paths over and over again.

In an underground cave, our hero takes on two dire wolves and a strong, evil torlok.

A hint book is available, or you can get help on CompuServe or GEnie. But this is the sort of game which shouldn't require outside assistance. *Prophecy of the Shadow* has a great deal to offer, and if the sequel takes care of the frustration factor it will be a very strong game.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; 286 or better; VGA graphics; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, and Roland sound cards; supports mouse.

CONFLICT: KOREA

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

Allocate air resources to interdict enemy supplies or support ground operations.

The Korean conflict offers many fascinations for the military historian, for it was a war that ushered in a slew of new tactics and concepts. It was the first attempt at military containment of Communism in which American soldiers — as opposed to surrogate Filipino or Greek forces — actually fought. It was the first conflict sanctioned by the United Nations; the first massive confrontation between technologically superior western armies and Third World armies, whose main resources were inexhaustible manpower and a willingness to take casualties on a scale that no western army had sustained since the Battle of the Somme; and it was the first "limited war," in which the cost of total victory was judged too high to bear in the political sphere.

The hypothetical 1955 scenario mostly confines U.S. involvement to air power.

Before the conflict settled down to grinding stalemate, the Korean War was characterized by intensely dramatic, sweeping action: the initial North Korean onslaught, the backs-to-the-sea stand at Pusan, MacArthur's incomparably brilliant amphibious *coup de grace* at Inchon, the Allied drive to the Yalu River, and the stunning Chinese counter-counter-attack which pushed the world, for a few hairy weeks, close to the brink of nuclear war.

The strategic overview is useful for maneuvering reserves and reviewing the "Big Picture."

Considering the appeal the Korean conflict offers to the avid wargamer, it's surprising so little attention has been paid to it until now. SSI's *Conflict: Korea* does a solid, if somewhat dogged, job of re-creating the war's first, most dramatic year. The game system is exactly the same as that used in *Conflict: Middle East*, featuring beautiful maps and graphics, an awesome database, a somewhat pokey mouse interface for issuing commands and moving units, and an infuriatingly vague system of reporting casualties — you're told the "percentage of equipment" lost by each side, rather than just receiving even an intelligence officer's estimate of enemy losses. Such percentage figures would appear to be largely meaningless for the Chinese, anyhow, since they had virtually no equipment to lose and won most of their victories at the cost of horrendous casualties — a fairly important aspect of the Korean War which is seemingly ignored in this game.

Nevertheless, the battle scenarios are tense, compelling affairs, especially the year-long campaign game entitled "The Dragon Wakes," which beautifully simulates the epic ebb and flow of the action, and a hypothetical 1995 scenario in which the U.S. contribution is mainly in the form of air power. The Chinese intervention in the winter of 1950 is like a thunderbolt: one minute you're slicing through shattered North Korean stragglers, the next minute the map is covered with ten zillion battle-hardened Chinese!

As with *Conflict: Middle East*, the computer often jumps in and tells you "Peace talks have started" just as your counter-offensive is really picking up steam (that means you have to cease combat operations or victory conditions are no longer valid). You can override this — the temptation to do so is strong enough to give you newfound sympathy for MacArthur — but if you do, the game will eventually wind down to a stalemate, just as the real thing eventually did. Long-term replayability prospects, once you have finished each of the four given scenarios, would therefore seem to be scant; but the four basic campaigns are first-rate war-gaming experiences, and in our opinion well worth the asking price.

As of this writing, there is only one other Korean War game on the PC market: SSG's *MacArthur's War*, which is handicapped by an obsolete interface that's been around since Commodore 64s were the rage. *Conflict: Korea* solidly fills the gap in games dealing with this unique war, but it's definitely not for novices.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA, EGA, or CGA graphics; high-density disk drive; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, or compatible sound cards; mouse (recommended).

AN AMERICAN TAIL

LANCE ELKO

Capstone has built much of its business on the strength of garnering movie licenses, and they continue that course with the release of *An American Tail: The Computer Adventure of Fievel and His Friends*. This graphic adventure aimed at kids stars Fievel, the delightful mouse who was the hero of *An American Tail* and *Fievel Goes West*, and includes the storylines of both feature-length animations.

The game has two distinct parts: the first half, set during the massive immigration to New York around 1900, follows the original film; the second half is based on the sequel film, in which Fievel and his family cross the continent by train for adventures in the Wild West.

Shortly after landing in New York, you need to win this card-matching game. You've got 15 moves.

An American Tail does an excellent job of capturing the spirit of both movies. Digitized frames from the films serve as backdrops throughout the game, and the animation is, at times, quite captivating. The musical score, also taken from the film, is charming, although it's repetitive to the point of annoyance.

In the role of Fievel, you must talk to a variety of characters and choose your response from among two or three possibilities, with wrong answers sometimes thwarting your progress. As you move through the adventure in search of various objects, you must play — and win — a number of subgames. These include variations on traditional games such as concentration, dots, the shell game, target shooting, and Simon Says. In most of these contests, you can play as many times as it takes to win.

The point-and-click interface is easy enough to use, but younger players — for whom the game is targeted — can easily become quite discouraged without some adult assistance. Feedback during play is minimal, and though kids can easily navigate from scene to scene, a few more on-screen hints or clues would help prevent frustration from setting in. As it is, certain sequences will need to be replayed again and again.

Like most graphic adventures, *An American Tail* is at times a game of trial and error — you learn which objects are useful, how you should respond to another character, which direction (left, right, straight ahead) to move from a certain scene, etc. You can die quickly at some points in the game, so it's important to save whenever you make any significant progress. This especially helps eliminate some frustration for younger players, who will likely lose interest if they must repeat the same game sequences several times.

One of the tougher contests takes place on the train from New York to the great American West. The cats put you to the test in a game of dots.

The *American Tail* package doesn't suggest an age range, but it seems that 7-12 is appropriate — the player must be a fairly good reader. The manual includes a glossary of terms that are encountered during play. Most of these words are not common in a child's vocabulary, so it's quite useful.

Becoming a slingshot sharpshooter takes a bit of practice. Score big out here in the desert, and you get to shoot some of the cats back in town.

Aside from faithfulness to its source, the greatest strength of *An American Tail* is its value as an introduction to graphic adventures. My nine-year-old son, despite some frustration, progressed through the game, learning how and where to move, how to gather objects, when to check inventory, and so on. Most of the basics of the genre are here, and if you've got a would-be adventurer in your home, *An American Tail* is a solid starting point. Just be ready to lend a hand.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; 256-color VGA, EGA, or Tandy 16-color graphic display; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Roland LAPC-1, SoundMaster, or Tandy 3-voice sound; supports mouse or joystick.

CRISIS IN THE KREMLIN

GARY MEREDITH

Examples of Soviet street-humor permeate the simulation, underscoring the durability of the human spirit in the face of hunger and strife.

We've all heard Santayana's admonition about reliving history we choose to ignore, but is that really the case? Is hindsight really 20/20? You'll probably never find a computer game which totally unravels the complexity, subtlety, and especially the irrationality of human affairs. But if you want to have some fun tinkering with the superficial aspects of history, give **Spectrum Holobyte's** *Crisis in the Kremlin* a look.

Crisis in the Kremlin takes one of the most significant events of this century, the fall of the Soviet Union, and dissects nearly everyone and everything that went into making 1991 a year for the ages. The game's strongest point, the abundance of information on the collapse of the USSR, is also its weakness — the info isn't always integrated into the game in the most useable fashion. That's not the best situation for smooth playing, but it might be the best way of simulating the situation faced by Gorbachev and Yeltsin. The Soviet Union itself was hardly a well-oiled machine, particularly near the end, so perhaps the awkwardness of *Crisis in the Kremlin* is quite apt.

You start the game by choosing which of three Soviet leaders — Brezhnev, Gorbachev, or Yeltsin — you'd like to be. Things are quite cheery at the beginning, with letters and telegrams of congratulation pouring in. But political honeymoons are short-lived at best, and yours is almost over as soon as it starts. Complaints of shortages, unemployment, and manufacturing problems begin immediately, and you must also handle disputes with increasingly bold Republics and former Warsaw Pact allies who can't wait to get the Soviets out of their new democracies. It's then that you begin to realize the futility of governing a nation so wealthy in natural resources and manpower, but so poor in the infrastructure and organization needed to control them.

This is what comes of building subs and SS-20s, instead of developing a system for the efficient dispersal of the vast quantities of food produced in the Ukraine and elsewhere.

Fortunately, you have something the real Soviet leaders did not — instantaneous monitoring of all facets of the economy, society, and, most importantly, the military. There's always the spectre of a military coup, and one of your first actions should be either to put people you can trust in control of the military — good luck with that — or to mollify the present military leaders with a few concessions while you go about dismantling the gargantuan bureaucracy that's made them so powerful.

As the new "Comrade President," you have something in common with every Soviet leader since Lenin — the debt incurred by your predecessor, as well as his budget. If all his priorities were centered on defense, and you need to get some wheat planted, you may be out of luck. The inertia of something as massive as the Soviet ship of state makes any change of course difficult, especially when your financial tugboat is more like a dinghy with a 3-horsepower Evinrude.

If you're into the minutiae of governmental processes, *Crisis in the Kremlin* should make you happy for a long while. Those bored with statistics, however, may be asleep by the time the real fireworks start. And patience is undeniably the key to this game. It's all too easy to panic and divert resources unwisely just because one group or another is yelling a bit more loudly. You'll discover that *Crisis in the Kremlin* closely resembles a chess game, with the ability to see several moves ahead a prime requisite.

Although the graphics are only 16-color, the designers have managed some very convincing effects, and you soon forget about the color limitations. As a bonus, several real CNN clips have been included: you may discover (as real-life leaders did during the Gulf War) that CNN is sometimes a more dependable source of information than your own intelligence agency.

There's much that's very good about *Crisis in the Kremlin*. Humorous touches abound, and you have to admire the incredible amount of research behind the game. Getting at all the information within the simulation, however, is sometimes difficult; whether you choose to look at that as a flaw or as an accurate portrayal will probably determine your enjoyment of the game.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA or EGA graphics; high-density disk drive; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, and Roland sound cards; mouse recommended.

THE DARK QUEEN OF KRYNN

NEIL RANDALL

The Krynn series of AD&D adventures comes to an end with this latest offering, and it's different enough to make you wonder what might have come next. Of course, we'll undoubtedly find out in a different AD&D series, but the Krynn offerings, because of their unusual style, were a departure from SSI's other AD&D games.

It's clear from the start that *The Dark Queen of Krynn* follows the lead of *Death Knights of Krynn*, the previous entry. You begin the game with a battle, and you're not really free to move on your own for several hours of game play. As adventurers, in other words, your task is to fight your way out of a nearly endless series of difficult combats, none of which are really of your choosing. One group of these takes place in an undersea kingdom, so there's a uniqueness here, but for even die-hard AD&D fans the battles might a case of too much, too fast.

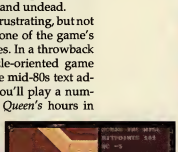
What long-time AD&D players will find is a game that looks different from the rest, and which plays a bit differently as well. The graphics are better than before, with all displays fancier and more colorful. Mouse control is smoother, and sound support is more extensive. But the most important change of all is the addition of a LOAD option to the Encamp menu. At almost any point in the game, you can encamp your party and restore a previously saved game. Now, this may seem hardly newsworthy to players of most other role-playing games, but past AD&D products have forced you to go to a training hall in town to restore saved games, or (and this was the usual option) reboot your system. You still can't restore a game in the middle of combat, and this is the next must, but at least it's an improvement.

Throughout the game, your party will come upon teleporters. You're always asked if you want to take them, and you should almost always answer yes.

Despite these enhancements, however, *Dark Queen* is the least interesting of the three Krynn games. There's very little exploring to be done, since almost the entire game is devoted to combat. For much of the quest you must move your party with the Search option turned on, in order to find the game's unbelievably high number of secret doorways, and this does two things. First, it diminishes the interest in secret passageways, which are, after all, exciting only when rare. Second, combat is more likely when Search is turned on, so your party will find itself arrayed against seemingly endless groups of giant spiders, bats and insects, and undead.

Here, a group of pirates near a stream feels the fury of one of your spellcaster's Fire-ball spells. This is a great all-purpose spell, but try not to kill your allies with it.

This is frustrating, but not as much as one of the game's other features. In a throwback to the puzzle-oriented game design of the mid-80s text adventurers, you'll play a number of *Dark Queen's* hours in what are essentially mazes. Fairly early in the game, for instance, you enter a lighthouse and battle your way to the top. Starting with the sixth floor, your party will be transported almost at random, and on the tenth level the whole thing gets incredibly frustrating. As if that's not bad enough, a door at the top of level 11 simply won't open, no matter what you do — and according to the people who have discussed this game on GEnie, the door is not meant to be opened at all! Such a feature shows extremely poor game design, but it's not the only such flaw in this game.



Early in the game, the party faces a trio of dragons. Use your spell-casters well here, and don't forget your knights.

I quit *Dark Queen of Krynn* three-quarters of the way through. It just wasn't worth the effort, and I suspect a number of gamers will feel exactly the same way.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; 286 or better; VGA, MCGA, or EGA graphics; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, and Roland sound cards; supports mouse.

NEW KONAMI 900 NUMBER

Konami's new 7-day, 24-hour Game Hint and Tip line is up and running. Owners of Konami software can dial 900-896-HINT to receive hints and tips for up to 20 Konami titles, with extended hints of up to 10 minutes per game. Konami's computer titles as well as their video games are covered by the service.

The phone call costs 70 cents per minute, and a touch tone phone is required.

BOOM TIME FOR BRODERBUND

Summer was a busy time for **Broderbund**. The Novato, CA, software publisher acquired PC Globe and its line of electronic atlas programs, which includes the popular *PC Globe* and *PC USA*. Company spokespersons acknowledged a nice fit between Broderbund's educational geography Carmen Sandiego line and PC Globe's desktop geography programs.

Broderbund also announced that it has signed three new affiliate label agreements. Disk-based products from New World Computing, The Waterford Institute, and Asciiware/Ascii Entertainment Software will all be exclusively distributed in North America by Broderbund.

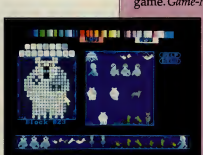
SOUND IN FLIGHT

The soon-to-be-released UltraSound sound card from **Advanced Gravis** will debut with a special bundling that includes Electronic Arts' award-winning *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*. For this special edition, *Yeager* is being modified for optimal use with the UltraSound, and will include a new stereo soundtrack and enhanced sound effects.

The suggested retail price of the special bundling is $219.95. The UltraSound card will retail for $20 less.

ROLL YOUR OWN

Recreational Software Designs has released a new product that lets you create your own action or adventure game. *Game-Maker* runs on 286, 386, and 486 machines with 640K RAM, a mouse, and 256-color VGA graphics.



Game-Maker's *Block Designer tool features a zoom-in drawing area, viewing area, choice of color palettes, and a set of drawing tools.*

The program's environment includes mouse-driven menus that guide the creation of color palettes, picture elements, scenes, sounds, monsters, and characters. Background animation is supported, and up to 20 different animation sequences are allowed for each created character. After all game elements are in place, they are combined to make a multi-level game of user-defined complexity.

The *Game-Maker* package includes several games that were created by the system, each of which can be played and modified by the user.

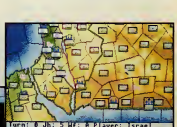
Game-Maker is available for $89 plus shipping. For more information, contact Recreational Software Designs, P.O. Box 1163, Amherst, NH 03031. To order *Game-Maker*, call 1-800-533-6772, or 603-332-8125.

ON THE HORIZON

SSI has announced four new games that will be available shortly: *The Summoning*, a nonlinear, magic-based FRP title; *Cyber Empires*, a strategy-arcade science-fiction game, previously published in the U.K. by Milenium under the title *Steel Empires*; *A Line in the Sand*, a game based on the 1991 Iraq War (from TSR's board game of the same name); and *SpellJammer*, a TSR fantasy space-adventure game based on the AD&D Forgotten Realms world.

The Summoning

Cyber Empires

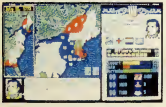


A Line in the Sand

SpellJammer

CD-ROM publisher **ICOM Simulations** plans to release three new interactive CD-ROM titles by Christmas. *Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective II*, like its predecessor, will feature three separate murder mysteries with 90 minutes of 15 frames-per-second video. The other two titles are *Beyond Shadowgate*, an action adventure, and *The GCA Tour*, a fantasy golfing simulation that lets you play in locales such as the peak of Mt. Everest.

Look for four new PC titles from **Koei** in the coming months: *Gemfire*, a fantasy role-playing game with a medieval flavor; *Liberty or Death*, a simulation of the American Revolution in which you take command of either the British or the Colonists; *P.T.O.: Pacific Theater of Operations*, a WWII naval simulation that lets you command the U.S. Pacific fleet or the Japanese Imperial forces; and *Inindo: Way of the Ninja*, an RPG in which you must assemble warriors and defeat Nobunaga.



Liberty or Death

A veteran game publisher from the U.K. has found a new home in the U.S. **Impressions** has opened an office in Farmington, Connecticut, and plans to release approximately eight strategy titles per year in the U.S. market. All games will support 256-color VGA graphics (as well as 16-color VGA and EGA) and all major sound cards.

The first five Impressions titles to hit the market are *Air Force Commander*, *Air Buck$*, *Conquest of Japan*, *Discovery: In the Steps of Columbus*, and *Paladin 2*. With the exception of *Paladin 2*, each of these titles should be available now. (Look for *Paladin 2* in early- to mid-October.)

Impressions tells us that *Air Force Commander*, a large strategy simulation of air warfare, includes 26 scenarios based in the Persian Gulf, and features political issues, resource management, military strategy, and real-time play. A

Air Force Commander

WWII scenario disk is planned for October release.

Starting out in 1946 with a DC-3 and just a few dollars, your goal in *Air Buck$* is to build an airline while going up against three competitors. Decisions about where to buy the rights to land, which planes to buy and when, how much to spend on marketing and maintenance, and so on, affect your success.

In *Conquest of Japan*, you're given five cities, each with a budget for buying various types of soldiers to build an army. Individual battles let you control the entire army, a unit, or one soldier. Battle results are then fed into the larger campaign game. *Conquest of Japan* offers one- or two-player modes, and a feature that places cities differently with each new game.

Conquest of Japan

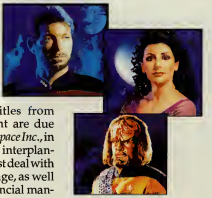
Discovery: In the Steps of Columbus is a role-playing strategy game in which the player, as Columbus, sets sail for the New World. Game elements include pirates, sea battles, product trade, creation of cities, farms, forts, warehouses, schools, churches, etc., and competition with other nations.

Discovery

Paladin 2, a sequel to Omnitrend's *Paladin* FRP game, is a joint project between the companies, and uses the game system pioneered by *Breach*. Described by Impressions as an advanced version of *Breach 2* in a medieval setting with a better interface and improved graphics, *Paladin 2* will include 20 game scenarios as well as a scenario-building program.

Paladin 2

Spectrum HoloByte is hard at work on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, a graphic adventure that uses digitized artwork from the popular TV show. Look for the game to arrive in March, 1993.



Star Trek: The Next Generation

Several new titles from **RAW Entertainment** are due this fall and winter: *Space Inc.*, in which you play an interplanetary trader who must deal with space pirates, sabotage, as well as resource and financial management; *Spoils of War*, a strategic war game developed by the German Design Group in which you try to be the first to conquer and control a continent; *Fleet Commander*, a WWII naval simulation from the designers of the highly acclaimed *Action Stations*; and *Dominant Species*, a 1- to-8 player strategy game based on the theory of evolution.

Space Inc.

GP

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